

Key Concept/Message

In this instalment of Heart for the Earth, we move to the third day of creation described within Genesis One and focus on ecology. Those working within the discipline of ecology draw attention to the relationship between diverse living organisms in physical environments. These interconnected relationships resonate strongly with the 'community of creation' theology introduced within the 'Day 1' worship plans.^[1] The first act of collective worship within this instalment (below) invites reflection, appreciation and wonder upon the interconnected nature of life on the planet (perhaps even stimulating a 'Wow! Nature is amazing!'). In the second plan, attention turns towards the ways human action has had a negative impact upon the environment ('Ow!') before exploring a powerful example of an initiative encouraging diverse and flourishing ecosystems (a 'How'). This inspirational example of response to a pressing need of our time provides ample opportunities for the school community to spiritually reflect upon how we too can show a heart for the earth through our ecological awareness.

Bible Story

Genesis 1 (particularly verses 11-13)

Then God commanded, "Let lights appear in the sky to separate day from night and to show the time when days, years, and religious festivals begin; they will shine in the sky to give light to the earth"—and it was done. So God made the two larger lights, the sun to rule over the day and the moon to rule over the night; he also kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day. (*New International Version*)



[1] Detailed in the Heart for the Earth overview (pages 4-5):

<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/HftE-Overview.pdf>

Gather

As the school community gathers, play this video on 'A year in the life of an oak tree'. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdKYWiVy9FY>

Follow the school's normal gathering routines, using words of liturgy which are familiar to students and adults

or

Light a candle and offer the following prayer: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you'. Response: and also with you. (To support pupil understanding of the Christian belief in God as Trinity here, why not light a single candle which has three wicks, lighting them in turn as each 'person' is acknowledged?)

As a think-pair-share activity, invite the school community to ponder: how many plants and trees can you name?

Engage

Recap the 'community of creation' theology with the school community using the PowerPoint slides (see footnotes for an example explication in a previous plan)[2], reminding them that we have previously used this worldview to help us think about how we can show a heart for the earth through our wise use of electricity ('Day 1') and water ('Day 2'). Today, we will use this 'community of creation' thinking to explore ecology and ecosystems.

[2] <http://tinyurl.com/y3wrpfxr>

In the creation narrative of Genesis 1[3], God follows the creation of light and water to create plant-life on the third day:

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

(Genesis 1: 11-13, New International Version)

A moment ago, we thought about all of the plants and trees we knew of. And there are so many! Did you know: the world contains around 309,000 types of plants and 73,300 types of trees. New, undocumented plants are still regularly discovered! Each of them are amazing and fascinating in their own way, but what is incredible is the part they play within ecosystems.

What is an ecosystem? An ecosystem is a community of living things (such as plants and animals) living together within a particular environment. Let's look at an oak tree (which we saw through the seasons as we entered) as an example:

According to the Woodland Trust[4]:

- An oak tree supports around 2,300 species. It provides food and a home for living things such as birds, insects, mosses and other plants
- 326 of these species depend on an oak for their survival
- No other tree in the UK supports so much biodiversity



[3] You may wish to reiterate that there are many views about Genesis 1 – some think it is literal truth, some think it is a symbolic poem which describes what God and creation are like, some have other views about this narrative.

[4] <https://tinyurl.com/y8664a68>

Here are some examples:

- Pollen – a food source for bees
- Flowers – eaten by squirrels
- Acorns – food for badgers, deer, wood mice and woodpeckers
- Nests for many birds such as blue tits and wood warblers
- Bats, spiders and moths live in the trunk of oak trees
- On the ground, stag beetles and millipedes feed on rotting leaves

The oak tree is a great example of an ecosystem at work – each organism depends on and requires each other; each has an important part to play.

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Let's reflect on flourishing eco-systems alongside the 'community of creation' idea we have been thinking about in Heart for the Earth. I wonder (think-pair-share):

- How might the 'community of creation' biblical idea (shown in images below and on the PowerPoint) link to flourishing ecosystems?
- How does the idea of a connected ecosystem make you feel? (Amazed? Intrigued? Concerned? Something else?)



Respond

In the next creation narrative in Genesis (Genesis 2), God places the first humans in a garden. I wonder – how important do you think this is? Out of all places, why a garden? Take a moment to silently ponder.



A prayer is offered below (taken from [Prayers for World Environment Day | The Church of England](#)). Invite the school community to make it their own, should they wish to, by saying 'amen' at the end. You may also invite pupils to make a heart with their index fingers and thumbs whilst they pray or reflect.

Creator God,

*We acknowledge that as your handiwork,
we stand alongside all that you have made.
Trees and rivers, mountains and valleys,
soaring birds and scuttling creatures,
all are held within your care.*

*May we grow in our love and appreciation
for the fabulous variety around us;
and may our awe and wonder draw us closer
to the natural world, and through it to you,
the God of all things.*

*We pray in Jesus' name,
Amen*

Send

As you go about this week, I invite you to look closely and keep noticing. How many different plants and trees can you see? Can you see ecosystems in action?

Key Concept/Message

The first act of collective worship within this instalment invited reflection, appreciation and wonder upon the interconnected nature of life on the planet (perhaps even stimulating a 'Wow! Nature is amazing!'). In this second and subsequent plan, attention turns towards the ways human action has had a negative impact upon the environment ('Ow!') before exploring a powerful example of an initiative encouraging diverse and flourishing ecosystems (a 'How'). This inspirational example (<https://www.marstonvale.org>) of response to a pressing need of our time provides ample opportunities for the school community to spiritually reflect upon how we too can show a heart for the earth through our ecological awareness.

Bible Story

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12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day. *(New International Version)*



Gather

Follow the school's normal gathering routines, using words of liturgy which are familiar to students and adults.

or...

Light a candle and offer the following prayer: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you'. Response: and also with you. (To support pupil understanding of the Christian belief in God as Trinity here, why not light a single candle which has three wicks, lighting them in turn as each 'person' is acknowledged?).

Engage

Ow!

In our last Heart for the Earth collective worship, we thought about how amazing ecosystems are. Ecosystems are communities of living things (such as plants and animals) living together within a particular environment. We saw how a single oak tree provides food and a home for around 2,300 species, and how each organism depends on and requires each other. An oak tree is just one example; ecosystems can be found everywhere!

However, many of the world's ecosystems are in danger. What do you think might be endangering ecosystems? How does this make you feel? *Invite reflections from the school community – some factors include rising temperatures due to climate change, pollution, loss of habitats (such as woodlands and wild meadows)[1]. You might wish to record some of these ideas on the board to refer to later.*

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You may notice that many of these factors damaging ecosystems are caused by humans. Too often, humans have seen themselves as 'masters' of the planet – we can do whatever we want to the environment in order to make money or have a good time. This links back to the 'dominion' worldview we have been thinking about:

[1] <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/26facts>



A Dominion World View

In our Heart for the Earth collective worships, we have been thinking about Genesis 1 – the creation story at the start of the bible which describes God creating the world in six days. The next chapter of the Bible – Genesis 2 – describes how God created the first two humans (Adam and Eve) in the Garden of Eden. Here, the first humans were given a clear instruction to be carers and guardians of the earth – not as 'masters' but as 'members'. Some Christians have said that 'caring for God's creation was our first task and [because of unwise human actions] has become our greatest challenge' (Lausanne Creation Care Network).

I wonder, instead of thinking of humans as 'masters' of the planet and all life upon it, would it be better to think of ourselves as 'members'? What do you think? Agree? Disagree? Bit of both?

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How? The example of the Forest of Marston Vale

The Forest of Marston Vale is a community forest covering 61 square miles between Bedford and Milton Keynes. For the charity that supports this work, they believe that 'Trees make life better. For people, for wildlife, for the planet'. Since starting in 1990, those working and volunteering for this charity have:

- planted two million trees and plan to plant another five million to help ecosystems flourish;

- created over 1,140 hectares of new woodland so far (that's about 1,750 football pitches!); and
- helped combat the climate crisis through tree planting. Trees clean our air and lock in carbon (it's carbon dioxide which covers the earth like a duvet and keeps heat in, leading to climate change). The trees planted in the Forest already remove 4,917 tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere every year.

Let's hear from Jo Roberts, Community Engagement Officer for the Forest of Marston Vale: <https://youtu.be/M5CCDDshJvg>

Respond

Due to the efforts of the Forest of Marston Vale workers and volunteers, amazing things are happening. Due to their tree planting, and the planting taking place by others all over the country, the area of the UK covered by woodland has increased from 9% (1980) to 13% (2022).[2] This helps ecosystems and wildlife flourish, as well as combatting climate change. I wonder how this makes you feel?

Invite the school community to reflect on how they might show a heart for the earth through ecological awareness and action using the 'I wonder' questions below. Choose a method of your choosing e.g. think-pair-share, silent reflection.

I wonder, how can we show a heart for the earth through our ecological awareness...

...as a school?

...in our own lives?

...at home?

...with our friends?



[2]

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/woodlandnaturalcapitalaccountsuk/2022#:~:text=The%20UK%20land%20area%20covered,3.6%25%20or%20C2%A312.6%20billion>

Offer a time of prayer using the teaspoon (thank you, sorry, please – tsp) approach below. Invite the school community, should they wish to, to offer a silent, in-head prayer to God by completing the sentence starters. An example is given.

Example:

Dear God,

Thank you for creating the world and all life upon it

Sorry for the ways I have not looked after creation the best way that I could have

Please help me to love and look after all plants and animals

Amen

Dear God,

Thank you...

Sorry for...

Please...

Amen

Alternatively, why not offer the opportunity for a pupil to offer a spontaneous prayer based on what we have been thinking about in this act of collective worship?

Send

Keep the community thinking and reflecting: I wonder, how will you show a heart for the earth through ecological awareness going forward?

