

SEPTEMBER

Releasing & Receiving
Wendy Janzen

OVERVIEW

In September we mark the autumn equinox – the day of the year where the sun rests above the equator and there are equal hours of light and dark everywhere in the world. It also marks the official transition from summer to autumn in the northern hemisphere.

In this worship gathering we are invited to reflect on the balance that comes with living into the autumn lessons of releasing and receiving. What do you need to release? What do you need to receive? Where do you find the balance? Look around for signs of release in the natural world - such as deciduous trees losing their leaves and plants scattering seeds - and signs of receiving as animals gather up the bounty in preparation for the coming winter. What lessons do they have to teach us?

With children you may want to do some balance activities, or as you explore the area look at different objects and ask ‘I wonder’ questions like, ‘I wonder who gave this _____, and who will receive it?’ (ie, an oak tree gave this acorn, birds or deer receive it for food) What gifts can we give and receive from God and/or from the Earth?

See the [Introduction](#) to this series of worship services for further insights into planning a forest/wild church worship service.

GATHERING & GROUNDING

Begin with time for welcome and introductions, along with a land acknowledgement.

Enter into this time of worship with intention – openness, curiosity, and attentiveness – expecting to meet God here in this place. Start by taking a good look around you at the faces of the people who have come, but also at the sky, the trees and plants, and the Earth. Give thanks for this place, this season, and this community of creation.

Invite participants to close their eyes and relax their breathing. Reflect on the balance

between inhale and exhale. Both are equally necessary. Breathe in, receiving the breath of life, and breathe out; releasing that which does not serve you. (pause)

As you come into fuller connection with the place where you have gathered, take time to notice the sounds around you - both human sounds and more-than-human sounds, sounds that are close and sounds that are far. (pause)

Now pause to notice your sense of touch – the touch of the sun, rain or wind on your skin, and the touch of your feet on the earth. Shift your weight back and forth from foot to foot, or heel to toe, feeling the firmness of the earth hold you. Allow yourself to feel the connection you have with this place through your body. (pause)

God is here among us - holding us, guiding us, listening to us. Let's pray:

Source of all life, breathe your spirit into our time together, that it might be a gift of exactly what we need today. May we be open to receive your wisdom and gracious presence, may we enter into this time of worship open heartedly, and may we open our lives to receive and give freely. Amen.

READINGS & REFLECTIONS

Read any of the following readings, or others of your choice. Use them to formulate your theme and invitation for the wandering & wondering time. This is not intended to be a full sermon, rather a couple of paragraphs to plant seeds that can help participants to engage with the theme themselves.

Genesis 1:11-13; Ecclesiastes 3:1-12; John 12:24

“Autumn leads the season in modeling the sacred practice of recycling. What seems to die bespeaks a quiet truth; that which falls into the earth is never lost. The earth receives it and preserves it.”

– Joyce Rupp & Macrina Wiederkehr, [*The Circle of Life: The Heart's Journey Through the Seasons*](#)

Many of us struggle with finding balance in our lives. We either have too much on our plates, or too little. The rhythms of the seasons remind us that there is ebb and flow in life, and the need to both give and receive. How does a life of faith reflect these rhythms and patterns? We are invited to explore the invitation, the sacred threshold, the graceful balance, that comes when engaging two seemingly opposite postures / actions (such as releasing and receiving).

WANDERING & WONDERING

Send participants off for 30 minutes of silent wandering and wondering. This can be done while seated (taking in the surroundings through sight & sound) for those who have limited mobility or don't wish to move around. It is an opportunity for personal reflection, listening for God's presence and wisdom as revealed in the natural world. Encourage people to see what draws their attention, and to be curious about it. What might God be wanting them to notice or learn?

SHARING

Invite participants into a time of sharing with one another about what they experienced during the wandering time. This can be done all together, or in smaller groups. It is an opportunity to give voice to something they observed, something they reflected on, or how they experienced God's presence.

SENDING

The blessings of Autumn
are ours this day:
blessings of ebb and flow,
releasing and receiving,
gathering and sharing,
we receive them
as lessons of God's
transforming presence.
Amen.