

NOVEMBER

Lament for Lost Species

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OVERVIEW

November, in much of the Northern Hemisphere, is a month of decline, decay, and death. Many annual plants have died back. Deciduous trees have lost their leaves. Many species are moving into or toward dormancy. The sky seems more gray and moody. There can be a certain melancholic feel to the month, with days getting shorter and the landscape looking more barren and colourless.

In my Mennonite tradition, we always mark “Eternity Sunday” or “Toten Sonntag” in November on the last Sunday before the start of Advent. It is a service where we remember and name the people who had passed away in the previous year. Similarly, some church traditions mark All Souls Day on November 2nd. In this vein, November feels like a suitable month to hold a service of lament for species that are endangered or extirpated in our watershed.

This service requires a little homework to find out the names of plants, animals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians, etc. that are at risk in your own area. A google search should easily provide you with this information. Once you have a list, write down the name of each species and its status (endangered, extinct...) on a slip of paper or card stock, creating a set of cards with a different name on each card. Be sure to have enough cards so each person attending can take one.

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

GATHERING & GROUNDING

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

Take a moment to look around you and acknowledge the faces in the circle, and this place where we have gathered - the sky and earth, the trees and plants, animals and

birds, clouds and sun...

Close your eyes. Notice your breathing. Feel the freshness of the air entering your body, feel its coolness (and the sun's warmth) on your face. Take some time to release any distractions you carry with you and bring the gift of your full presence into this time of worship.

Listen to the sounds of this place (breeze, birds, silence).

Feel the earth firm beneath your feet, holy ground, supporting your body, supporting all life. Remember that it is from Earth that you came, and to Earth you will return.

Broaden your awareness to God's Presence below us, above us, before us, behind us, in all things, yet held by no thing. Let's pray

Creator, we give you thanks for this place,
this land where we have gathered,
and we are mindful that we are
kin with all who call this place home.
Christ, our Wounded Healer,
who also suffers the pains of creation,
gather us close to your heart as we
express our grief and lament today.
Spirit of life, blow among us as
we join our hearts in worship
together with all of creation. Amen.

READINGS & REFLECTIONS

Read any of the following scripture passages (or others) and readings and use them to shape a few reflections to offer before the time for wandering & wondering.

Psalms 44:23-26, Isaiah 24:4-6a, Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:19-23 & 26

“Whether or not we consciously recognize it, the daily diminishment of species, habitats, and cultures is noted in our psyches. Much of the grief we carry is not personal, but shared, communal.” - Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*

“At worship we can hear the cry of bees being decimated, animals being slaughtered, trees being cut, and mountains having their tops removed. At worship people will cry with them! And they will cry out for what they hope, dream, and need. They will offer and demand, search and give, relate and reciprocate.” - Cláudio Carvalhaes, [Ritual at World's End](#)

WANDERING & WONDERING

It is helpful to move from generalities to specifics when it comes to lament, and so we have here cards that have printed on them the names of species from our region that are either threatened, endangered, extirpated, or driven out from our province. Naming and recognizing these species is one way of acknowledging the effects of climate disruption and other environmental crises on the species with whom we share our bioregion – they are or were our neighbours in the community of creation. Take a look at them, and then choose one, or let one choose you. (Either have the cards spread out on the ground in the center of the circle for all to see. Or, pass the deck around, inviting each person to take one before passing the deck to the next person.)

For the next 30 minutes you are invited to either wander or sit and hold this species in prayer. You may wish to imagine its role and place in our ecosystem and the hole that is or would be left if it were to become extirpated or extinct. Extend compassion to this species in your heart. We will name them aloud in a litany when we return. There will also be a place to name other laments.

Return here at _____.

SHARING

Offer an opportunity for sharing reflections, insights, or feelings around the circle or in small groups.

LAMENT

It is important to create liturgical space to remember and name, in sorrow and anger, what we have loved, endangered, damaged, or lost. Let us enter into a time of lament and confession before God, each other, and the more-than-human witnesses of this place.

In the following litany, leave space after each of the three sections for people to speak. After people have spoken, lead a spoken response along the lines of “Lord have mercy” or a sung version of a Kyrie.

Litany

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, we bring to you our prayers of lament for the Earth. In your mercy, receive our prayers as we name out loud the species of our region that are threatened, endangered or extirpated:

(pause, then lead the response) *Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison*

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, we bring before you our laments as we name other environmental concerns we carry:

(pause, then lead the response) *Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison*

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, we hold before you other particular griefs and laments that are on our hearts today:

(pause, then lead the response) *Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison*

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, kyrie eleison, have mercy on us. In your kindness and love, you have asked humanity to be earth keepers for your Creation, to live as your image-bearers in a world you created with delight. We confess that we have turned from your will, often abusing the earth for greedy and short-sighted purposes. Now we are facing global climate disruption and other ecological crises as a result of our rebellion. Forgive us our sins, and the sins of our society and its leaders, which have failed to care for what you created for good. In your mercy, lead us to repentance, compassion, and life. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

SENDING

As we close our time of worship together, hear these words from scripture as words of benediction and invitation:

I have set before you life and death . . . therefore choose life. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

May the God of life go with you.

Amen