

Welcome and Introductions

As we say hello, if you want to, you are welcome to say in a word, what soil means to you.

Leader: Out of darkness came light, and the power of God was revealed;

All: in the running wave and the flowing air, in the quiet earth and the shining stars.

Leader: Out of the dust came life, and the image of God was revealed;

All: in the human face and the gentle heart, in the warmth of flesh and the depth of soul.

Leader: And God looked at creation, and behold, it was very good.

Leader: One day, when my son was four years old, we were gardening. I asked him to put some more earth in a pot. He stopped dead, his eyes getting rounder and rounder. 'We're in space', he said, looking from the soil on his spade to the faintly visible moon in the sky.

Reflection - Reader 1: *(Hildegard of Bingen 12th Century)*

The earth is at the same time mother.

She is mother of all that is natural, mother of all that is human.

She is mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all.

The earth of humankind contains all moistness, all verdancy, all germinating power.

It is, in so many ways, fruitful.

All creation comes from it, yet it forms, not only the basic raw material for humankind, but also the substance of the incarnation of God's son.

Leader: Our first song is a favourite of a friend who has been an organic gardener for decades and cared faithfully for the soil in his garden, as well as leaving plenty of space for wildness.

Song: *(by Fred Pratt Green, adapted)*

**Loving creator God, you formed this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.**

**Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind;
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.**

**Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have needed,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.**

**Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!**

Reader 2 - Bible reading:

The bible reading is from Genesis 2 verses 4 to 9, and 15. Listen now to the word of God.

For the Word of God in scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us

All: Thanks be to God.

Reader 3: - Reflection (by Ruth Valerio)

We have been created from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7): we are *adam* created from the *adamah* (Hebrew for earth or ground)... earth creatures... dusty ones. As such we have an innate connection with the wider natural world – something many of us experienced when we were in lockdown.

As earth creatures, we have been created to image and represent God. With that we affirm that all people have been made in the image of God. There is radical equality here.

Equality between all people and humble connection with the wider natural world are deeply embedded in what it means to have been created in God's image, formed from the dust of the ground.

Song: (sing twice) The peace of the earth be with you, the peace of the heavens too.
The peace of the rivers be with you, the peace of the oceans too.
Deep peace, falling over you. God's peace growing in you.

Reader 4: - Caring for the soil

In modern society we have come to associate soil with dirt, sinfulness, poverty, death and disease. In doing so, we not only seek to control the soil, but deny that God's image and creativity is in it. We also build up barriers of fear, which prevent us feeling at one with creation and giving it no credit to be able to heal and balance itself. At best we tend to think of soil as the means for growing what we choose, or the medium into which God's message is sown.

It is difficult to know how to protect and nurture the soil, without over-controlling it. Ruth Valerio questions the use of the phrase 'Stewardship of creation', which has possible undertones of controlling creation and making efficient use of its resources for our own purposes.

Kevin O'Neill says that, "Soil is everything." Kevin runs Walcott Organic Fruit Tree Nursery. He cares for the soil by rotating the use of the land. His field is divided up into areas. Trees are grown in a particular area for two to three years. After this, grass seed and clover are sown. For six or seven years, nothing is taken from this area; it is allowed to rest and restore itself. Mowings are left on the surface as green manure and the clover captures nitrogen from the air and fixes it in the soil. Compost for the saplings is made from horse dung, added to compost from the local council recycling centre, and sawdust.

Kevin says that we should not take more out of the soil than we put in. Rather we should build it up for the benefit of all living things and future generations, not just use it for growing what we want.

A Blessing for those who work the soil:

May the soil be blessed and fertile, and the worms and creatures of the earth do their work.
May the miracle of life be seen in green shoots, and the deer find wild places to graze.
May the rain fall gently upon your fields, and plants defend the soil from erosion.
May the sun shine warm upon your face, and its rays not scorch the land.
May your care of the land be valued, by all who learn of your work.
At the end of the day, may peaceful sleep restore your strength,
And may God always, hold you in the hollow of his hand.

Time of Sharing: Do you have any thoughts you would like to share, about soil, or tips for caring for the soil in ways that don't harm the environment?

Prayers of intercession:

Leader: Forgive us God, for our lack of respect and humility, for our wish to control creation. May we learn to pause, listen and wonder.

(pause)

This we know, the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth.

All: This we know.

Leader: Help us God, to recognise we are part of one family, one story; that your image is in every living thing. May we learn from the way plants and tiny creatures work in community, for the benefit of all. We remember before you, those who are feeling isolated, hurt or under-valued.

(pause)

This we know, all things are connected, like the blood that unites one family.

All: This we know.

Leader: Open our eyes God, to the wonders in creation, the pattern of a snowflake, the structure of roots. May we take opportunities to share together our joy in creation and our insights into living lightly.

(pause)

This we know, we did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it.

All: This we know.

Leader: Inspire us God, in our caring for your world. Make us aware of our power to change things for the better, for all of creation, not just the parts that are useful to us. We remember before you, how soil around the world is under threat from greed, mismanagement and extreme weather.

(pause)

This we know, whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

All: This we know.

Leader: Thank you God, for the moments that reconnect us with your creation: the sunsets, the birdsong, the taste of summer fruits, the stars on a clear night, the laughter of a child or the smell of fresh bread.

(pause)

Let us give thanks for the gift of creation, give thanks that all things hold together in Christ.

All: Thank you, God. Amen

Song: 1. Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently,
nourish the life of the world in our care:
gift of great wonder, ours to surrender,
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

2. We who endanger, who create hunger,
agents of death for all creatures that live,
we who would foster clouds of disaster,
God of our planet, forestall and forgive.
3. Let there be greening, birth from the burning,
water that blesses and air that is sweet,
health in God's garden, hope in God's children,
regeneration that peace will complete.
4. God of all living, God of all loving,
God of the seedling, the snow and the sun,
teach us, deflect us, Christ re-connect us,
using us gently and making us one.

Closing prayer:

**All: Creator God, we look in wonder at all you have made.
You confront us with such beauty and such power, and such responsibility.
Teach us, Creator God, to respect this planet, our home,
to live carefully within the web of life,
and to give you the glory. Amen.**

The Grace:

**All: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

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<https://ruthvalerio.net/environment/formed-from-the-dust-of-the-ground/>

<https://ruthvalerio.net/bibletheology/why-we-are-not-stewards-of-the-environment/>

<https://capitalscoalition.org/one-teaspoon-of-soil-contains-more-living-organisms-than-there-are-people-in-the-world/>

One teaspoon of healthy soil contains more living organisms than there are people in the world. Without this "biological diversity" there would be no terrestrial life on earth.

The Four Principles of Organic Farming <https://www.ifoam.bio/why-organic/shaping-agriculture/four-principles-organic>

Principle of Health - Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.

Principle of Ecology - Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

Principle of Fairness - Organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

Principle of Care - Organic agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

A quote from a Sanskrit text written about 3,500 years ago highlights what we are relearning: 'Upon this handful of soil our survival depends. Husband it and it will grow our food, our fuel and our shelter and surround us with beauty. Abuse it and the soil will collapse and die, taking humanity with it.'

Huge number of free resources and advice about home composting on Garden Organic's website:

<https://gardenorganic.org.uk/sustainable-communities-resources>