

THE TREE OF LIFE AND THE LIFE OF TREES

SERVICE ORDER

This service order provides a menu of ideas, either to slot into an existing service pattern, or to create a specially-themed service. It is designed to be used with the accompanying list of songs and hymns, and with the sermon on 'The Life of Trees'. If children are present, the confession, response and prayers are all suitable for involving children, but the sermon is adult-orientated. There are some excellent children's activities in the accompanying material. The sections here include:

- *p.2 Introduction – with ideas for songs / time of worship*
- *p.3-4 Confession – two alternative forms, one traditional, the other interactive*
- *p.5 Ministry of the Word - readings and sermon*
- *P.6 Act of Commitment (tree-planting)*
- *p.7-8 Prayers of Intercession (responsive; can involve up to 10 people)*
- *p.9 Conclusion & Blessing*



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INTRODUCTION

Sentence from Scripture:

“Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.” Psalm 96:12

Words of Introduction:

Today our theme is ‘The life of trees and the tree of life’. It may seem an unusual theme for a service, but think for a moment ... The bible starts and finishes with trees, from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem planted with trees that bear fruit every month. At the centre of our Christian faith, Jesus died on a wooden cross, the carpenter crucified on a broken tree, which has become for us the tree of life. Today we gather to worship God and to celebrate God’s creation of the trees on which we and all life depend: for soil, water, food and even the air we breathe. Today we also consider the threats caused to trees and forests by human greed and carelessness. We are called to respond, by worshipping the God who creates and sustains the trees of town and field and forest, by recognising our dependence on trees, and by committing ourselves to enable trees to flourish and, in the words of Psalm 96, to “Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy”.

Opening Prayer:

Living God, we gather in your presence to worship you.

May our worship join with all creation’s, praising you according to its kind.

We celebrate the beauty and importance of the trees that you have made.

May the worship of our hearts be reflected in the worship of our lives,

So that we enable the trees of the field to clap their hands,

And the trees of the forests to sing for joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Songs of Worship:

Choose one or more songs / hymns from the accompanying list. If children are present it may be good to include ones they can join in with, such as:

- All things bright and beautiful (include ‘The tall trees in the green wood’ verse)
- He’s got the whole world in his hands (with ‘He’s got the trees and the forests in his hands’)
- The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it
- Think of a world without any flowers
- We come to you (All creation looks to you)
- When I look at the trees
- Who put the colours in the rainbow (includes ‘Who put the tree inside the acorn)



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CONFESSION

Choose **either** the *Responsive Confession* (which may be more suitable in a structured or formal service) **or** the *Act of Repentance* (which suits informal and all-age worship).

A. Responsive Confession

Call to Repentance:

Hear the words of the prophet Joel (*Joel 1:12*): "The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree - all the trees of the field - are dried up. Surely the people's joy is withered away." Let us call to mind our sin against God, our neighbour and God's creation. (*A few moments of silence*)

Prayer of Confession:

Creator God, you planted a world of beauty and variety, filled with trees for food and shade. We have turned forests into deserts, and many living trees into disposable consumer products. We confess our selfishness in misusing your handiwork to resource our greed. Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Redeemer Lord, whose hands worked with wood and whose body was broken upon the tree of Calvary, we confess that it was our sin that took you to the cross. We have sought to become wise in our own eyes, and thus eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We repent and return to you, to receive from the tree of life. Christ have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Spirit of God, you make all things new, causing seeds to grow, buds to blossom, fruit to ripen. Sow within us the seeds of repentance and humility, to live gently within the community of creation, and to bring forth the fruit of your Kingdom of justice and peace. Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Prayer of Absolution:

May the Lord cleanse you from all your sins and call you anew to follow his purpose in the garden of creation, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**



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B. Act of Repentance

A wooden cross is placed at the front of the Church. Give everybody a piece of paper or post-it note (made from recycled paper!), and a pen or pencil. Encourage them to write or draw what they want to say to God as we reflect on how we destroy and damage trees and forests unnecessarily. Explain that we will all have the opportunity to place these pieces of paper at the foot of the cross, which represents the tree of life and the place of new beginnings.

Call to Repentance:

Hear the words of the prophet Joel (*Joel 1:12*): “The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree - all the trees of the field - are dried up. Surely the people’s joy is withered away.” Let us call to mind our sin against God, our neighbour and God’s creation.

*On a screen display pictures of deforestation. An excellent gallery of photos can be found at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/gallery/2007/oct/24/1#>. A looping PowerPoint presentation (*The Life of Trees – Act of Repentance*) is also available to be downloaded.*

Song: Look around you

(adapted for this pack from ‘Kyrie Eleison’ by Jodie Page Clark © 1976 Celebration Music; ‘Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison’ means ‘Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy’ in Greek. Music can be found at www.worshiptrax.co.uk/Songs2MP3/LookArou_MP3.html)

Look around you, can you see? God’s creation on its knees,
Burning forests, dried up rivers; Oh my people, weep with me.
Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Vine and fig tree bear no fruit. People dying, wildlife too.
Called to care for God’s creation, we have failed to follow you.
Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Forgive us Father; hear our prayer. Help our lives to show your care,
Planting seeds of hope and healing, share your life throughout the earth.
Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

During the singing, encourage people to come forward and place what they have written at the foot of the cross (or stuck to the cross if using post-it notes).

Prayer: Spirit of God, you make all things new, causing seeds to grow, buds to blossom, fruit to ripen. Sow within us the seeds of repentance and humility, to live gently within the community of creation, and to bring forth the fruit of your Kingdom of justice and peace. Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**



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Prayer of Absolution: May the Lord cleanse you from all your sins and call you anew to follow his purpose in the garden of creation, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

It may be suitable for children to leave for their groups at this stage.

Song / Hymn: see separate document with suggestions. Possible choices include 'Jesus is Lord, creation's voice proclaims it', 'O Lord my God' and 'Sing unto the Lord a new song'

Bible Readings: The sermon is based on **Genesis 2:8-17**. If other readings are needed, it is suggested that **Revelation 22:1-5** is used as a New Testament reading, and if a Gospel reading is required, then **Luke 13:18-21** (the Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast).

Genesis 2:8-17 (New International Version)

⁸ Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground - trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. ¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Revelation 22:1-5 (New International Version)

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

Luke 13:18-21 (New International Version)

¹⁸ Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches. ²⁰ Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? ²¹ It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."



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ACT OF COMMITMENT

An opportunity to plant seeds or seedlings; depending on the situation, these could be planted in the grounds of the church – in which case it may only be feasible for one tree to be planted – or given to people to take home. In an urban area, it may be possible to work in partnership with a local organisation (local government, school, park, wildlife charity) to find somewhere to plant trees. If seeds are planted, think carefully about what you use – they should be native species, locally sourced, ideally that benefit wildlife as well as providing shade, beauty, medicine or food.

Leader: As a sign of our commitment to caring for the trees of God's creation, we have the opportunity to plant seedlings today. Jesus reminded us that a mustard seed can grow into something much bigger. Seeds speak of hope and of an investment in the future. Although our world sees continued deforestation and destruction, we can make a difference by something as simple and small as planting and nurturing a tree. Wangari Maathai, the Nobel Peace Prize winning Kenyan who inspired the planting of millions of trees said: "Christ was crucified on the cross ... I always say, somebody had to go into the forest, cut a tree, and chop it up for Jesus to be crucified. What a great celebration of his conquering death it would be if we were to plant trees ... in thanksgiving."¹ Today, as we plant these seeds, let us commit ourselves to thanksgiving for God's gift of trees and to growing in our care for creation.

Leader: Lord, bless these seeds (saplings). Grant them fertility and steady growth. May they be signs of your Kingdom; a Kingdom which starts with the small and weak, but grows in secret and one day will fill the whole of creation. Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

The seeds / saplings are planted in the earth.

Lord, may they these seeds (saplings) grow to have deep roots and spreading branches, and may they be fruitful in season. May they be a home to many creatures and a blessing to the community of creation. May we remember to care for them, to water and tend them, and may they teach us about our dependence on trees, and on you. Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

The seeds / saplings are watered.

Collect: Creator God, you planted in Eden a Garden and placed us within the garden to serve and preserve it. Forgive us where we have turned the beautiful variety of creation into infertile deserts. Sow within us once again the seeds of our calling to be good stewards of this created world. May we know our dependence upon you and upon your creation, and through our work and worship may all the trees of field and forest be set free to sing your

¹ www.greenbeltmovement.org/a.php?id=115 'Heaven Is Green: An Interview With Wangari Maathai'



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praise once more. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

If possible, involve children in writing and reading their own prayers based on the theme of trees, or else involve children and young people in reading the following responsive prayers. If only two people are available to lead prayers, Reader 1 should also be Reader 3, 5 etc. and Reader 2 should also be Reader 4, 6 etc.

Reader 1: Genesis 2:8-9: "Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground - trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food."

Reader 2: We thank you Lord for trees, for tall trees that tower over us, for trees we can climb, and for tiny seeds that grow into huge forests. We thank you for the colours of leaves in autumn, for fruits and nuts that we love to eat, for shade and shelter, for fuel and firewood.

Readers 1 & 2: Thank you Lord for making trees.

All: Thank you Lord for making trees.

Reader 3: Psalm 104:16-17: "The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the junipers."

Reader 4: We praise you Lord that you water and care for the trees you have planted. Thank you that trees give homes and food to so many birds, animals and other creatures. Thank you for forests full of wonderful and mysterious living things.

Readers 3 & 4: Thank you Lord for making trees.

All: Thank you Lord for making trees.

Reader 5: Deuteronomy 20:19: "When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an axe to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them?"

Reader 6: Lord we are sorry for the ways we destroy so many trees, in the name of war or progress or just because we are greedy. We are sorry for the damage this does to wildlife and to the poorest of our neighbours around the world. Help us to stop the deforestation that is driving so many species to extinction, and help us to plant new trees wherever we have to chop some down.

Readers 5 & 6: Help us Lord to care for trees.



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All: Help us Lord to care for trees.

Reader 7: Isaiah 44:14-15 “He [the carpenter] cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak ... It is used as fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it.”

Reader 8: Lord, we too use trees for good and evil; for the necessities of life but also to make idols that reflect our materialism and self-worship. Forgive us Lord. Teach us to worship only you as Creator, and to treat your creation with respect and wonder. May we use it carefully and seek the flourishing of all that you have made.

Readers 7 & 8: Help us Lord to care for trees.

All: Help us Lord to care for trees.

Reader 9: 1 Chronicles 16:33: “Let the trees of the forest sing; let them sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.”

Reader 10: All your works worship you, O Lord – mountains and rivers, trees and flowers, animals and people. Help us to see your world with your eyes – to know its beauty and importance. Help us to hear the worship of creation, in the whisper of the wind, the singing of the birds, and the groaning of the trees. We dedicate ourselves anew, O Lord, to caring for trees and forests as part of our worship of Jesus, by whom and for whom all things were made.

Readers 9 & 10: Help us Lord to care for trees.

All: Help us Lord to care for trees.

Leader: Lord we bring all our prayers to you. Accept them in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who, as Lord of creation, designed all the trees of field and forest and who, as carpenter of Nazareth, worked with wood to recreate items of beauty and usefulness. Renew your image in us, that we might celebrate the goodness of your handiwork, and use it to your glory. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.



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CONCLUSION & BLESSING

Final Song: You shall go out with joy

Prayer of Blessing:

May the word of God take root in your heart,
grow strongly in your life,
and bear much fruit for God's Kingdom;
And may the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you and with all God's creation,
Now and evermore. **Amen.**



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