



Leura Uniting Church
12 September 2021
Season of Creation – Humanity Sunday
Stephen White

Welcome to worship

Today we continue in the Season of Creation, and this is Humanity Sunday.

Acknowledgement of Country

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.
We acknowledge the Darug and Gundangurra People, traditional custodians of this land under God.
We commit ourselves again to caring for this land and working for reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

Rev. Murray Speer.

- L: O Lord, our God,
how majestic is your name throughout the universe!
- P: **Even newborn infants declare your glory!**
- L: The vastness of the heavens is your refuge,
P: **making even the angriest soul fall silent.**
- L: When I look at the vast sky, the handiwork of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you arrange,
P: **I think, what are we that you are mindful of us?
That in our smallness you will care for us?**
- L: Yet you have gifted us with divine awareness,
P: **and anointed us with light and spirit.**
- L: You give us responsibility for the works of your hands;
P: **you make us stewards of creation.**
- L: Not only the livestock and house animals,
P: **but the wild creatures, the birds and the fish,
and all the inhabitants of the earth.**
- L: O Lord, our God,
P: **how majestic is your name throughout the universe!**

Prayer of Adoration

Rev Bruce Prewer

God of secret purposes and extravagant blessings, we come to praise you.

We come because we want to,

we sing our songs because we are glad to,

we pray for your grace because we need to,

and we ask for the love of Christ in our hearts because without it we are a dead loss.

Please lift every shutter within our mind, and open every door within our soul, that you, the Lord of glory, the God of countless hosts, may come in.

Through Christ Jesus, the joy of loving hearts.

Amen!

Song TIS 168 For the fruits of all creation

1. For the fruit of all creation,
thanks be to God;
for His gifts to every nation,
thanks be to God;
for the plowing sowing reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safekeeping,
thanks be to God.

2. In the just reward of labor,
God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbor
God's will is done;
in our worldwide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will is done.

3. For the harvests of the Spirit.
thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit.
thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us.
for the truths that still confound us.
most of all that love has found us.
thanks be to God.

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Fred Pratt Green

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Prayer of Confession

500 Prayers for All Occasions
No. 209 Falling Short

Lord, we confess your right to exercise your sovereignty over the whole creation and over every part of our lives.

But from the very beginning we have used our free will to please ourselves and not you,
to live for our own ends and not yours,
and to spoil our relationship with you and with each other.

We confess that we have fallen short of living lives that bring you glory.

There is no way that, in our own strength, we can put our world or our lives in order again.

Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, forgive us, cleanse and renew all things.

For the glory of your name.

Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Seasons of the Spirit

L We are joined forever to God's remarkable love
which brings us to a place of healing and action.

Through this love, we can live out these words:

PL: Earth does not belong to us – we belong to the earth.

Song TiS 146 God who made the earth

1. God, who made the earth,
the air, the sky, the sea,
who gave the light its birth,
God cares for me.

2. God, who made the grass,
the flower, the fruit, the tree,
the day and night to pass,
will care for me.

3. God, who made the sun,
the moon, the stars, is He
who when life's clouds come on,
still cares for me.

4. God, who made all things,
on earth, in air, in sea,
who changing seasons brings,
God cares for me

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Sarah Betts Rhodes

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Dramatized Readings for Humanity Sunday

(We are going to hear the two accounts of the creation of humanity from the Book of Genesis. You are invited to listen and reflect on the differences between these readings.)

Reading 1: Genesis 1.26-28

Merril

Then God said, 'Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of Earth and over every creeping things that creeps on Earth.

So God created humanity in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill Earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon Earth.

Reading 2: Genesis 2.7-8, 15, 19

Merril:

Then the Lord God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life. And the human being became a living creature.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East. Then the Lord God took the human being and put the human being in the garden of Eden to serve and preserve it.

Then out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal in the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the human being.

Voice 1 I am the first human being, the voice of the human being in Reading One. I am Adam and Eve. I am humanity!

Voice 2 I am the first human being, the voice of the human being in Reading Two. I am Adam and Eve. I am humanity!

Voice 1 God made me in a special way. The word of God in Genesis One says so!

Voice 2 And God made me in a special way. The word of God in Genesis Two says so!

Voice 1 I am created in the image of God. Do you understand? The very image of God!

Voice 2 I have been made personally by God. Do you understand? By God's own hands!

Voice 1 I am like God, created in God's own likeness.

Voice 2 I am liked by God. I even live in a garden where God likes to walk and talk!

- Voice 1** I have human reason. That makes me superior to all other living creatures! Superior! Get it!
- Voice 2** I am flesh taken from Earth itself and breath that comes from God. So I am kin with all other creatures. We are family! Do you understand family?
- Voice 1** Family? Fiddlesticks! I have dominion over all creatures. I dominate! I tame! I rule all other creatures. Your family!
- Voice 2** I have a partnership with all other creatures. We are friends. We are partners.
- Voice 1** I am authorised by God to subdue Earth, to harness nature, to put creation under my feet. Yes, to control your friends!
- Voice 2** I have been given the responsibility by God to serve Earth and preserve it, to care for Earth as God's garden.
- Voice 1** I can conquer creation. I rule! I rule!
- Voice 2** I groan with creation. When you rule, I suffer. I suffer!
- Voice 1** I am the king of Earth. I bear the image of God! I am king over creation! I rule!
- Voice 2** I am a servant on Earth, caring for creation.
- Voice 1** I am king! God said so! God said so!
- Voice 2** I am a servant, God said so!
- Voice 3** Wait just a minute! Stop your arguing!
- Voices 1 & 2** I have God's word on my side!
- Voice 3** Sure you have! But do you have the final word? Do you have Jesus' word? Do you? (*Silence*)
- Voice 3** Who is the one who reflects the true image of God on Earth? Come on! Who?
- Voice 1 & 2** Jesus Christ!
- Voice 3** Who is the true servant of God? Come on. Who?
- Voice 1 & 2** Jesus Christ!
- Voice 3** And how does Jesus invite us to live? To rule like the Romans and dominate like their Caesars?! Or to follow the way of the cross and serve as Christ came to serve? Listen to his word from the Gospel for today!

Reading 3: Mark 10.42-45

Merril:

So Jesus called the disciples and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them.

But it is not to be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.

- Voice 1, 2 & 3** This is the Gospel of our Lord, the answer of Christ.
We are to serve as Christ served.

People Lord teach us to serve.

If we read through the whole creation story in Genesis 1, we find the tone of the creation story changes. Up to now the pattern was

And God said, "Let there be ...heavens and earth, a dome in the midst of the waters, waters under the sky, lights in the dome, and living creatures.

But here we have:

'Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them."

Up till now the creation has been quite impersonal, God said and it was done.

But now mankind is made in the image of God.

In Genesis 2, we read:

Then the Lord God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life. And the human being became a living creature.

God himself formed mankind, and breathed his breath into him. We have the breath of God within us, keeping us alive day by day.

If we turn to our wonderful Psalm we read as a Call to Worship, we read:

"What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour." Psalm 8:4,5 NIV

Today I want to look at where humanity fits in with the big picture.

I will be using material from Seasons of the Spirit and will often be using their words.

Humanity Sunday is an invitation to see ourselves as set in the centre of creation for purposes beyond those that fulfil our human needs. This is a day to see humanity as one small part of Creation.

Humans were not created to use and abuse the creation.

If we read both creation stories we get a fuller picture of our relationship, kinship, with all of creation, and our responsibilities to the rest of creation. More importantly we see our unique relationship we should have with our Creator.

The first thing the text describes is that humans are made in the likeness or image of God.

Humans are the first and only creatures described as having divine characteristics. Up until the writing of this text, any image for God was avoided by the Israelites. But this was not a fixed image (graven image) like that of some of the Near Eastern religions that surrounded them. It was, rather, a living image.

The role of the human made in God's image was to mirror God to the world and to care as God cares.

Humans are given power to take up God-given responsibilities. This means being in relationship with and caring for the rest of God's creation.

The word dominion (Hebrew *rada*) expressed in this passage is one that has been under debate for many centuries. Some believe it puts humans at the top of the hierarchy, giving humans power and authority over all other creatures. The verb (*rada*) however, suggests the task is one of care-giving and nurturing, not exploitation.

Humans should relate to the world as God would – helping the world to reach its full potential.

This description of humans also reveals more about the characteristics of God. The fact that God creates in God's image means the divine is revealed rather than hidden or concealed. God is not removed, and ordering from afar, but rather is engaged in relationship with creation. God shares power with others in the ongoing act of creation. Verse 28 describes God's blessing of humanity which includes God giving power, strength, and potential.

If we read a bit further, in Genesis 3:8, we have the lovely picture of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. God would spend time with his creation, and especially humanity, - Adam and Eve.

Our God is not an impersonal God, a distant God, but one who wants to be part of our lives as we enjoy his beautiful creation.

Psalm 8 is a psalm of praise, holding together both the cosmic span of God's creation and the intimacy of human life. All are part of God's majesty and are in relationship in the divine order.

We are to give praise to our great God, and to look at this beautiful world he has made:

"O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Ps 8:1 NIV

We can see God's majesty when we look at his creation: the universe, the smallest flower or insect, the birds, the mountains and valleys. We are blessed to live in a place where we can see the beauty of the world.

Unfortunately when we look around parts of our world we see a lesser picture of God's creation. We have polluted the air, the land and the waters. We have destroyed the natural habitat of millions of God's creatures. We have greedily cared for ourselves and let so many people suffer in poverty.

As we read the story of humanity throughout the Bible and world history, humanity goes their own way, forgetting about God and forgetting about caring for God's world.

But then God stepped in and came up with a plan to help humanity to come back to God and worship and serve him.

We think of the favourite verse in John chapter 3:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him." John 3:16-17 NIV

Jesus came to show us what God is like, and in such show us how we should live as beings created in his image.

Mark 10:41–45

After speaking about his approaching death and that on the third day he would arise, James and John came to Jesus and asked that they could sit on either side of Jesus in glory. They were thinking of status and power.

Jesus called the disciples together, and to them:

'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them.

But it is not to be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.
Mark 10:42-45

Jesus could have pulled rank, after all he is the Son of God, and demand people bow to him, but he chose to become a servant.

If we turn to the letter of St Paul to the **Philippians 2:1–8**, St Paul encourages his readers to imitate Christ in our lives.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Philippians 2:1-8 NIV

We are to humble ourselves before God, and serve each other rather than dominate each other.

We too should take on the attitude of servants rather than enforcing our “dominion” over our world.

If we look at the nightly news, or read news elsewhere, we are troubled to see the situation in Afghanistan, where it looks possible that Sharia law will be imposed upon the people. We see ongoing tension in Israel and the West Bank, the Military Coup in Guinea, the ongoing strife in Belarus, the terrorist shooting in New Zealand, just to name a few areas of conflict.

We see the results of climate change throughout the world: increasing the ferocity of climatic events: the destruction and loss of life by Hurricane Ida in the US, the floods in Belgium and Germany, the earthquakes and torrential rain in Haiti.

We read that the pink iguanas in the Galapagos Islands are in danger. We are even told that our beloved Koalas could be in danger.

We mourn with people around the world suffering sickness and loss of life through COVID 19 and the effects of lockdowns on families and businesses.

Yet in the gloomy outlook there is always some ray of hope.

We are thankful for the doctors and scientists who have developed vaccines. We are thankful for the selfless work of so many in helping people in distress and need. Doctors, nurses, emergency personnel, retail workers, teachers, and so many who put their own health at risk for others.

There are reports of some animal species surviving loss of habitat and thriving, of forests regrowing and some regrowth in the Great Barrier Reef. As happened last year air pollution went down as people were forced to stay home.

Let us think about the creation stories, the honour we have of being made in the image of God, in being a participants in the ongoing creation of our world, of being honoured to be called to serve God in this world, and being forgiven of our sins and made the Children of God. Let us walk with God in our daily lives.

Prayer

Creator God, You call us to remember our humanity because in knowing ourselves, we may know you more fully. May we be reminded that we are your creation and that you call us to responsibility and delight in our potential. In the beauty around and within us may we embrace your ways and remember our kinship with all creation.

Amen

Song - Wise up, Wise Up, You Christians

Melody: Stand up, Stand up for Jesus

1. Wise up, wise up, you Christians
Whose eyes are heaven bound,
God made us first in Eden
To serve and love the ground,
To work with God, the Gard'ner,
Whose breath in ev'rything
Brings life and hope and blessing
And makes our planet sing.

2. Be wise, be wise like Joseph,
Before those years of drought,
That curse of global warming,
Turns human faith to doubt.
Plan now to feed the hungry
A flood of refugees,
And share our garden planet
With ev'ry life in need.

3. Connect with Christ the Healer,
Whose love fills land and sea,
That breathing pulsing presence
In soil and stream and tree.
Unite with Christ in healing
The wounds of planet Earth
Until creation's groaning
Becomes a song of birth.

(Amid Global Warming)
C. 2008 Norman Habel

Declaration of Interdependence

[David Suzuki Foundation

*The Declaration of Interdependence expresses our values as an organization.
It was written for the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.]*

Please read with me (with microphones muted)

This we know

We are the earth, through the plants and animals that nourish us.

We are the rains and the oceans that flow through our veins.

We are the breath of the forests of the land, and the plants of the sea.

We are human animals, related to all other life as descendants of the firstborn cell.

We share with these kin a common history, written in our genes.

We share a common present, filled with uncertainty.

And we share a common future, as yet untold.

We humans are but one of thirty million species weaving the thin layer of life enveloping the world.

The stability of communities of living things depends upon this diversity.

Linked in that web, we are interconnected — using, cleansing, sharing and replenishing the fundamental elements of life.

Our home, planet Earth, is finite; all life shares its resources and the energy from the sun, and therefore has limits to growth.

For the first time, we have touched those limits.

When we compromise the air, the water, the soil and the variety of life, we steal from the endless future to serve the fleeting present.

This we believe

Humans have become so numerous and our tools so powerful that we have driven fellow creatures to extinction, dammed the great rivers, torn down ancient forests, poisoned the earth, rain and wind, and ripped holes in the sky.

Our science has brought pain as well as joy; our comfort is paid for by the suffering of millions.

We are learning from our mistakes, we are mourning our vanished kin, and we now build a new politics of hope.

We respect and uphold the absolute need for clean air, water and soil.

We see that economic activities that benefit the few while shrinking the inheritance of many are wrong.

And since environmental degradation erodes biological capital forever, full ecological and social cost must enter all equations of development.

We are one brief generation in the long march of time; the future is not ours to erase.

So where knowledge is limited, we will remember all those who will walk after us, and err on the side of caution.

This we resolve

All this that we know and believe must now become the foundation of the way we live.

At this turning point in our relationship with Earth, we work for an evolution: from dominance to partnership; from fragmentation to connection; from insecurity, to interdependence.

Text from the "Declaration of Interdependence," written in 1992 by David Suzuki et al.
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Available online at <http://dayidsuzuki.org/about/declaration/index.php>.

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Announcements

Prayer for the Offering

L God, our Creator, through your love you have given us these gifts to share. Accept our offerings as an expression of our deep thanks and our concern for those in need, including our fellow creatures on planet Earth.

P. **With all creation, we bless our Creator.**

Prayer of Intercession

Dennis Christie

As I prepared these prayers, I am reminded that humans have been created with great resilience. Yet, often we don't feel good about our circumstances, .. and those affecting others around the world.

The Bible has many references to help us cope with our frailty, and I will mark some in these prayers.

Let us enjoy the privilege of prayer together,... by giving thanks to God our Father

THANKS

Ps 136:1 "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good"

Lord, .. we give you Thanks and Praise for the answered prayers you have delivered this week. We think especially of the safe outcome of finding the lost toddler in the Hunter region. For all those volunteers and family members who did not give up hope, and sought your involvement to help bring a successful result to a dire situation.

We thank you that in our local region, we are currently safe from the imminent danger of the COVID pandemic, that is prevalent in some communities.

Let us turn together to consider others around the World

Philippians 4:6 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”

CONFLICT

Lord, ... we share a world full of conflict.

We pray for those who are persecuted by Government policies that restrict freedoms that we take for granted. Our prayers go out for the peoples of countries like, China, Myanmar, especially Afghanistan, and also the Middle East, and parts of Africa

Help those who have influence in the World, come together to find lasting ways for harmonious living between nations, and those with differing beliefs.

WELLBEING

In these times of “lockdown” restrictions, we think of all those individuals and families who are suffering from the long period of isolation from social events, family visits, sport, and being able to work

We think of businesses that cannot operate at present, and who have no (or at best, limited) financial support to stay viable for the days ahead.

We thank you for those skilled in caring for people who suffer with mental issues

As our “lockdown” continues, ...people are suffering from Fear, Depression, and Loneliness

Ps 27 “The Lord is my light and my salvation,...whom shall I fear ...”

Ps 42:5 “Why are you downcast , O my soul ? ..”

Matthew 28:20 (Jesus said) “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”

Lord, send your merciful servants into the lives of the suffering.

Help the vision of Hope prevail in their minds, and restore them to happiness

HEALTH

Ps 23 “the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

As we continue on life’s journey, we are accompanied with changes in our health and mobility.

We think of our church family, and those named in our Bulletin.

There are more in our hearts and minds, so we pause in silence now to name them to you, ... for protection and comfort

Pause ...in silence

We pray for all the front line Health workers who are extending themselves to keep us safe and well. Lord, give them strength and keep them well.

GOVERNANCE

1Peter 4:10 “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms”

Lord we pray for our Leaders.

Help all those elected into positions of authority, in our Local, State and Federal Governments, ..act with integrity, and wisdom, to provide us with safety, and compassionate regulations to maintain order in our communities.

We pray for the Leaders of the Uniting Church in Australia, as they continue to foster the direction of inclusiveness, cultural and gender orientation, and care for your creation.

OURSELVES

Matthew 22:37 “Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind ..”

Lord help each of us to stay fixed on the truth and the lessons taught by Jesus and the disciples as recorded for us in your Word (the Bible)

Let us share with the words of the Prayer that Jesus taught us

**Our Father in Heaven
Hallowed be your Name
Your Kingdom come
Your will be done on Earth, as in Heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Save us in the time of trial
And deliver us from evil
For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are yours
Now and forever**

Amen

Song - TiS 626 Lord of Creation

1. Lord of creation, to you be all praise!
Most mighty your working,
most wondrous your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

2. Lord of all power, I give you my will,
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom;
your service is song;
and, held in your keeping,
my witness is strong.

3. Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind;
rich truth that surpasses
our knowledge to find,
what eye has not seen
and what ear has not heard
is taught by your Spirit
and shines from your word.

4. Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
Your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,
Your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

5. Lord of all being, I give you my all;
if ever I leave you I stumble and fall;
but, led in your service your word to obey,
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

Jack Copley Winslow
1882-1974

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Benediction

Seasons of the Spirit

May the God who formed the singing cricket
bring us peace.

May the God who formed the rushing wave
give us strength.

May the God who formed the graceful eagle
grant us strength

May the God whose image we reflect
bless and guide us.

Amen