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# Beyond Consumerism EARTH DAY

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22 APRIL 2024



## *Reflecting on* FOOD & PRODUCTION IMPACT

We continue the Beyond Consumerism project by connecting with the contemporary environmental movement and exploring worship in new contexts. We know that food is essential but its production can create challenges. Industrial-scale farming methods, plastic pollution and climate change all have an impact on soil management and the care of the land, but at the same time we still need to feed a burgeoning world population.



Arthur Rank  
Centre

CONFIDENT RURAL CHRISTIANS

# Earth Day

Care for the earth is an essential part of living a Christian life, so Earth Day is a good opportunity to take this responsibility seriously. The first Earth Day was held in America in 1970. Since then, it has grown and evolved “activating billions across 192 countries to safeguard our planet and fight for a brighter future”.

**EARTHDAY.ORG** is committed to phasing out the plastics which pollute our countryside and oceans, posing a threat to human and planetary health. We face the challenges of industrial farming methods, which have led to over-farming and over-working the soil. Alongside this, the scientific debate continues around conflicting views regarding the value and safety of genetically modified crops.



## Explore what the Bible says about earth

Although we may not understand the complexity of how God did it, Genesis 1 – 2 give us a wonderful description of earth’s beginnings with the separation of land, sea and sky. The earth was living and active, productive and fruitful with seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees. It was good and it was designed to provide food. God did not create the earth to be empty but formed it to be inhabited. (Isaiah 45. 18) Humanity was instructed to cultivate the land and take care of it.

Many Psalms give thanks for the good creation. God has set earth’s boundaries with summer and winter (Psalm 74.17), echoing his promise to Noah after the flood: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” (Genesis 8. 22) There are inbuilt patterns and rhythms to life. The earth belongs to God, but he has gifted it to humanity. (Psalm 115.16)

We also find the principle of leaving ground fallow. A kind of Sabbath rest was recommended. Farmers were encouraged to sow and harvest crops for six years and then to have a fallow year, when the land was left unplanted in order to restore its fertility. (See Exodus 23. 11; Leviticus 25. 1 – 7; Nehemiah 10. 31)

In the New Testament, Jesus frequently used agricultural imagery. Several ‘Kingdom’ parables speak of soil. The Parable of the Sower is also known as the Parable of Four Soils, and Jesus reminds us to wait patiently like the farmer until ‘all by itself’ the soil produces corn. As we spend time considering the earth, the earth will start to speak to us about God.



## Investigate...

This is a great opportunity to explore a bit of our farming past and investigate soil management and regenerative agriculture today at home and abroad. Good choices can make a huge difference now and for future generations, balancing short-term profitability with long-term productivity and sustainability.

Soil forms the uppermost layer of earth’s crust, providing nutrients and water for growing. Soil can be affected adversely by weathering, climate change, and erosion as well as over-farming. Farmers are having to address these challenges. Regenerative agriculture focuses on soil health using sustainable practices in combination, such as cover cropping, compost application and reduced tillage. When soil is healthy it produces more food and nutrition, stores more carbon and increases biodiversity. Regenerative agriculture helps to fight climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Crop rotation is an ancient practice, which recognizes that growing the same crops in the same field wears out the soil and depletes it of nutrients. 17th century agricultural pioneer, Thomas Coke, introduced the Norfolk four-year rotation at Holkham Hall in Norfolk, choosing crops alongside cereals that helped the soil: clover to increase nitrogen, turnips to feed sheep that in turn manured the land. Where I live in rural Northamptonshire, my local farm uses a five year cycle, sowing wheat or barley, break crops of potatoes or oil seed rape to avoid a buildup of disease, and grass for hay and grazing.

In the garden we may be familiar with the humble strawberry tower, but a new food revolution is trying innovative forms of vertical growing on an industrial scale. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, urban indoor vertical farms grow fresh, flavoursome, pesticide free greens, while taking up less land and less water. Why not go on Google to do your own research.

# Worship Resources

## Opening Responses

from *Psalm 24.1, Colossians 1.17, Acts 17.28*

The earth is the Lord's,  
and everything in it.

**The earth is the Lord's,  
and everything in it.**

In him, all things hold together.

**The earth is the Lord's,  
and everything in it.**

In him, we live and move  
and have our being.

**The earth is the Lord's,  
and everything in it.**

## A Prayer for the Earth

Open my eyes, Lord,  
to see the earth as you see it.

Open my ears, Lord,  
to hear the cry of the land for  
healing.

Open my mind, Lord,  
to wrestle with the challenges.

Open my hands, Lord,  
to work towards a more  
sustainable future.

Open my heart, Lord,  
to love the earth as you love it.  
Amen.

## Soil under the microscope

This can be a fun intergenerational activity for outdoor worship in the churchyard or on a local farm. I have also used it in church too with four buckets of different soils. You might want to begin by reading the Parable of the Four Soils (Mark 4.1 – 9)

Now let's have a proper look at the earth. Investigate the soil. Touch it. Hold it. Crumble it. Get dirty! What is it like? Gritty or full of stones? Solid and sticky like clay? Light and sandy? Friable and crumbly to touch? A child's Magnifying Bug Viewer container can prove useful here. Why not test it to find out whether the soil is acid or alkaline. There are plenty of simple soil test kits available for under £10. Talk to local farmers to discover how this will determine what crops they can grow. Are there minibeasts in the soil? What role do they play? Is there evidence of any kind of pollution?

This simple activity can help us to understand a bit more about the land and some of the challenges facing farmers.

You can complete this activity with the following prayer:

### A Litany of the Four Soils

*A sower went out to sow.  
Some seed fell on the path  
and birds came and ate it up.*

Father of creation,  
we pray for the land,  
where birds mistake plastic for food.  
May we be responsible stewards,  
who work towards safeguarding  
wildlife.

**God of the soil,**  
restore our land.

*Some seed fell on rocky ground  
where there was not much soil.*

Father of creation,  
we pray for the land,  
where sun has scorched and wind  
and rain have eroded the soil.  
May we be carers of the soil,  
who work towards reducing the effects of  
climate change.

**God of the soil,**  
restore our land.

*Some seed fell among thorns  
which grew up and choked it.*

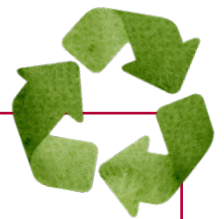
Father of creation,  
we pray for the land,  
where chemicals threaten and poison  
biodiversity.  
May we support agricultural research  
which works towards natural alternatives.

**God of the soil,**  
restore our land.

*Some seed fell into good soil  
where it produced an abundant crop.*

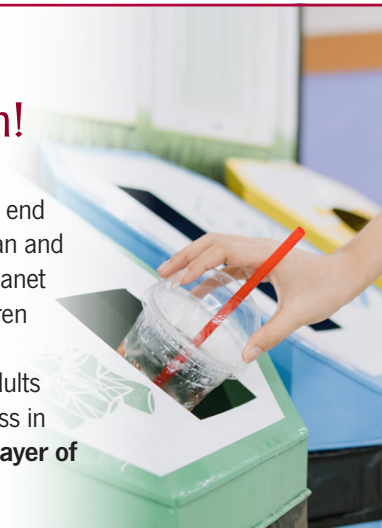
Father of creation,  
we pray for the land,  
where regenerative farming is already  
making a difference.  
May we encourage innovation and  
ingenuity  
to bring forth plentiful food for a hungry  
world.

**God of the soil,**  
restore our land.



## Put Paid to Plastic Pollution!

**EARTHDAY.ORG** as an organisation is committed to end plastics for the sake of human and planetary health with their Planet vs. Plastics campaign. Children and young people are great campaigners, keeping the adults on their toes. Raise awareness in your congregation with 'A Prayer of Confession' – see page 4.



## Become a Plastic Pollution Preventer

Sometimes God expects us to be the answer to our own prayers, and together we can make a difference. Here are few things we can all do to help:

1. Reduce your use of plastics at home and at church
2. Avoid single use plastic
3. Buy loose fruit and vegetables rather than pre-packed
4. Dispose of all plastic responsibly
5. Recycle as much as possible
6. Pick up litter, especially discarded plastic



## A Prayer of Confession

Creator God, you made the earth,  
but we have not always looked after it,  
Creator God,  
**forgive us and save us.**

When we discard packaging carelessly,  
and forget to recycle,  
Creator God,  
**forgive us and save us.**

When plastic in landfill fails to degrade,  
Creator God,  
**forgive us and save us.**

When we leave rubbish and plastic  
in gateways and ditches,  
Creator God,  
**forgive us and save us.**

When finely ground plastic filters into the soil,  
Creator God,  
**forgive us and save us.**

When the earth is choked,  
bringing disease and death,  
Creator God,  
**forgive us and save us.**

May the Creator God,  
who saw that the earth was good,  
forgive us our sins  
and strengthen our resolve  
to care for the earth responsibly  
for the generations to come.  
**Amen.**

## Music Suggestions

If you are singing outside, my advice is 'keep it simple'. Unaccompanied can be powerful. Avoid a fist full of paper and encourage people to 'look around them' as they sing.

'Behold, I make all things new', AM 328, works well unaccompanied

'God in his/such love for us lent us this planet', Fred Pratt Green, StF 727, CH4 240, MP 835

'Hear the song of our lament', Keiko Ying, music and video available at: [www.resoundworship.org/song/hear\\_the\\_song\\_of\\_our\\_lament](http://www.resoundworship.org/song/hear_the_song_of_our_lament)

'Know that God is good' (Mungu ni mwema) from Democratic Republic of Congo, in *One is the Body*, John Bell, - Easy to add your own verses and it works well unaccompanied

'As the seeds are planted' (Let the earth find rest) Chris Juby, music and video available at:

[https://www.resoundworship.org/song/as\\_the\\_seeds\\_are\\_planted\\_let\\_the\\_earth\\_find\\_rest](https://www.resoundworship.org/song/as_the_seeds_are_planted_let_the_earth_find_rest)

'Lord, bring the day to pass', Ian Masson Fraser, AM 543, CH4 238,

'Lord, you created a world rich in splendour, Nick Fawcett, Tune: Cavendish, HON 425

'The peace of the earth be with you', Guatemalan text translated Christine Carson, Music: John Bell, AM 845, StF 774, HON 639, works well unaccompanied

'Touch the earth lightly', Shirley Erena Murray, 1992, tune: Tenderness, AM 553i, StF 729, CH4 243

'Where are the voices for the earth?', Shirley Erena Murray, CH4 244

'You made a universe so full of wonder' (Until your earth is whole), Ally Barrett, <https://www.jubilate.co.uk/songs/you-made-a-universe-so-full-of-wonder>

*Ancient and Modern: Hymns and Songs for Refreshing Worship*, (AM) *Singing the Faith* (StF)

*Hymns Old and New: One Church, One Faith, One Lord* (HON) *Church Hymnal 4th Edition* (CH4)

*Mission Praise* (MP)

*Songs of Fellowship* (SoF)

## Useful websites

**[www.earthday.org](http://www.earthday.org)** You can find useful Fact Sheets on food systems and climate change, regenerative agriculture and plastic pollution as well as Toolkits and Quizzes

**[greenchristian.org.uk/food-matters](http://greenchristian.org.uk/food-matters)** Thoughts on food include rewilding, regenerative agriculture, GM crops, farm shops and veggie boxes, food waste, biodiversity

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