

Forest Church liturgy Sunday 2nd October 9.50am in the garden

Preamble – what is Forest Church?

Experimentation, playfulness, readiness to connect with nature, with the aim of learning, worshipping, meditating, praying and practising with the trees, at the spring, along the shore.

God is present in creation and can be understood through creation. The worship will happen when your heart is caught up in the beauty of the moment.

The aim is not to go into nature, but to let the barriers drop to be with nature i.e. the assumption is that we are always in nature anyway.

Forest church principles in our context

- Safety first – fire, garden, steps etc considered to make sure it is a safe physical space, and consideration given to ensuring a safe emotional / spiritual place
- Happens outside – in the garden, round the fire. Possibility of using a tarp if weather wet
- Participates with nature – ie not just doing what we usually do but outside. Allowing nature to contribute e.g. allow time for quiet, observation, reflection. Providing the opportunity allows for people to respond individually. Perhaps just get wet if it rains.
- Recognizes that God is revealed in nature – make responses as a result of the reflection time
- God speaks through nature
- Regenerative – mending damage done by humankind e.g. offset carbon in wood burnt during the day, perhaps link to Heart of England Forest. Give information about offsetting schemes / planting initiatives
- In the Christ tradition – attitude towards community, sharing, grace, creation-centred salvation

How about this:

gather with sense of presence in cosmic space/time; engage with each other about the day; first reading about nature experience in the city; reflect on own experience with object; remember creation in travail in prayer; second reading about making/creating; 2 minute talk; song prayer of dismissal

Liturgy

1. Gathering

Hopefully many of the Makers involved in the day will be there. As people arrive they are given something fragrant from the garden.

Leader	Risen Christ,
People	Your presence fills the cosmos
L	Cosmic Christ,
P	Your presence pulses through all galactic space across light years of time.
L	Living Christ,
P	In this nano-second we call 'now', in this nano-space we call 'here',
L	Make your presence felt among us.

P Yes, make your presence felt!

2. **Welcome / opening comments**

Lindsay. People invited to speak to their neighbour about hopes for the day.

3. Talk

Forest liturgy 02-10-16.

Reflection

As Lindsay said.... welcome to our first forest-church style liturgy. We think it's worked out well that our first one is on Harvest Sunday, and launches our Eco Fun Palace. So a little bit of background about what we are trying to do here, with the liturgy AND the Eco Fun Palace.

The forest church movement includes these principles:

- The aim is not to go into nature, but to let the barriers drop to be with nature. The assumption is that we are always in nature anyway
- There is an openness to playfulness, experimentation, a readiness to 'connect' with nature, with the aim of learning, worshipping, meditating, praying and practising WITH the trees, at the spring, along the shore
- There is a recognition that God is present in creation and can be understood through creation. The worship will happen when your heart is caught up in the beauty of the moment

So I hope this liturgy is allowing you to feel your way into some of this way of being.

But why would we want to do this anyway? Many of us choose to live in the city, worship at SJP (or not), meet our eco-church responsibilities in and through the building we think of as church, and have other strategies for managing our nature-time if we feel we need it. I'd like to share a few thoughts about our approach to eco-church, and the reasoning behind today's extravaganza.

- We face an unprecedented planetary crisis which requires a 'tectonic shift' in attitude of people of faith towards the earth (to quote the bishop of London). If we are to love the earth as our self, then we need to know and experience the earth in all our daily contexts, including worship.
- The planetary crisis can lead to turning away and paralysis because it seems too big, too overwhelming. So we need to find ways to evoke our celebratory, learning, creative selves, so that our eco-action springs from love and not from fear.
- The thrust behind the Fun Palace movement is all about building community and culture from the ground up, including all of ourselves – 'everyone an artist, everyone

a scientist'. Perhaps we could add 'everyone a co-creator'. There is empowerment here, and for me a sense of freedom.

- So the questions we asked went something like: 'What might happen if we set the Fun Palace ethos in an Eco context? What if we invited the scientific learned societies over the road in Burlington House to come to church and help us learn and participate in their work? This is work which reveals the earth to us in new ways, because that's what scientists do. What if we encouraged the talent in our own community to be expressed in the service of learning about and relating to the earth? And what if we invited all-comers to the conversation about how we should live in this new era, the Anthropocene, the age of humanity?

So that's where we're up to. For some answers, and more than likely a whole load more questions, please take part, look with new eyes, enjoy the day, learn and create.

4. Reading 1- reflection on a walk in the city (Annie Heppenstall) (to be edited)

My intention, as with other quiet days, is to practice deep listening and deep watching, opening myself to a greater sense of connection with the natural world, with the Divine and with humanity. I admit I find this a challenge in the city, which some have called a desert of human making. It's an act of seeking: looking for life, looking for the wisdom inherent in the natural world, looking for Christ, who to Christians is holy Wisdom; looking for hope. There's a quotation that I really love from the Gospel of Thomas, an ancient text which contains sayings attributed to Jesus, discovered along with other ancient writings, as recently as 1945 in a cave in the Bible lands:

Jesus said, "I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."

It describes my search. Splitting wood, lifting stones, I search for life, for that wonderful synthesis of creation and the Divine.

Moving on, I wonder how the row of plane trees ahead of me get enough to drink, with their collars of tarmac and bricks. I look down to the roots of one, noticing how it is causing an undulation in the bricks around it. I pause again and lean my back against the tree. To me, this is a way of making real contact, a moment of intimacy with another living being in a busy street. I imagine the tree's roots splayed out deep into the soil, searching for moisture. Cells work at a microscopic level to draw water up and up, the pillar of the trunk a living conduit to the leaves, which send moisture back out into the atmosphere. Amazingly, it's the transpiration from the leaves, the 'breathing', that helps to pull water upwards from the roots.

5. Remembering

Take the fragrant symbol you received at the door, rub it between your fingers and share with the person next to you a special memory of a moment when you were acutely

conscious that you or your space were intricately connected with a vast world of time and space.

6. Creation Prayer

Oh God:

Teach us to empathize with Earth. Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation, cries for justice from the land, the seas and the skies.

Make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit in creation, groans of longing for a new creation.

Make our hearts sensitive to the songs of our kin, songs of celebration from the sea, the forest and the air.

Teach us to care. Amen

7. Reading 2 Creating theme (John 1)

8. A few words spoken about creating / making in today's eco-context

9. Song – The cosmic Christ (Norman Habel) Tune = Amazing Grace

The risen Christ is more than one
Who waits on some far shore;
In, with and under ev'ry thing
Christ is the living core.

The hidden Christ sustains for us
The blueprint of the skies,
The wisdom in each fragile form,
The soul that lights the eyes.

The cosmic Christ moves deep below
To heal the wounds within,
When all creation groans in pain
Because of human sin.

The cosmos hails the Christ, the One
Who reconciles all things,
'Til all creation rises new
With healing in her wings.

10. Prayer

God, our Creator, as we reflect on the mysteries of the cosmos, we celebrate the wondrous design of the universe and the Wisdom that guides its course. Help us to discern how we are connected with living members of the cosmic community. Teach us to sense the presence of the cosmic Christ, whose presence fills and reconciles all forces in creation. Amen