

Worship in the Outdoors This Summer

Your worship service can happen at any time of day: sunrise, sunset, while stargazing, before or after a meal--whatever feels right to you. Start by creating a worship space: a candle on a small table or log, a campfire, a place to gather on the shore of a river, lake, or ocean, or whatever feels like a good space to you. You may wish to set out a few small items from your surroundings, e.g., shells, rocks, and leaves. Try to minimize disruptions: turn off cell phones and other electronics (unless they are part of the worship). Invite participants to gather.

What follows is a sample worship service with suggested music, prayers, and other resources. Feel free to use all or none of these materials to find a path to God. You may wish to play a relevant song from your iTunes play list or sing a song you know by heart. If someone plays an instrument, incorporate that. If people need to move (especially children), think of ways to use movement in worship. Think creatively about what will help all involved to connect to the holy in this setting.

Prelude

As people gather, someone who plays an instrument can be playing something quiet and contemplative. Or people can gather in silence.

Opening Prayer

In the beginning, O God,
when the firm earth emerged from the waters of life
you saw that it was good.
The fertile ground was moist
the seed was strong
and earth's profusion of colour and scent was born.
Awaken our senses this day
to the goodness that still stems from Eden.
Awaken our senses
to the goodness that can still spring forth
in us and in all that has life.

[Adapted from J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Benediction*, Eerdmans Publishing Company.
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Simple Gifts

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be.
And when we find ourselves in the place just right
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shall not be ashamed.
To turn, turn, 'twill be our delight
Till by turning, turning we come round right.
[This song suggests a number of movements. Young children could be invited to move to the music.]

We Are the Vines

The vine emerges from the earth,
nourished and nourishing.
Rises without visible connection;
roots hidden, promise unknown.
Strong to withstand storms,
fragile when plucked too soon.
So it is that we grow...
nourished by invisible connections to the living God, called to nourish that which is seen
and that which is yet buried within.
(Based on John 15:1-8. Copyright Katherine Hawker, 2000.)

Prayer

God,
You create us and all that is around us. We do not live independent of this world but intricately connected to it. You nourish us, help us to grow roots and branches, make us strong like the vine, and call forth from us that which is yet buried within. Forgive us for the ways in which we do not use your creation well. Help us to celebrate the many gifts of this planet earth. We pray these things in the name of the one who taught us to pray:
Our Father, Our Mother,
Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts
As we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
Now and forevermore. Amen.

Genesis 1:29-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Contemplation

Spend a few minutes in contemplation. Invite each person to study something small from nature: a rock, a shell, a flower, a leaf. Each person has his or her own object to contemplate. It may be helpful to have paper and pencils, pens, or crayons at hand to do a rubbing of the object, to trace it, to sketch it, or to write about it. In her poem "Praying," Mary Oliver writes that such contemplation can be "the doorway/into thanks, and a silence in which/another voice may speak." Do you experience anything holy in this contemplation of an object from nature? Does it open a path to God? Invite people to share, if they wish, what this time of contemplation brought to them.

Psalm 65 (Adapted from *The Message*)

Silence is praise to you,
 Zion-dwelling God.
And also obedience.
 You hear the prayer in it all . . .
Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer,
Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser,
Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash,
 of mobs in noisy riot--
Far and wide they'll come to a stop,
 they'll stare in awe, in wonder.
Dawn and dusk take turns
 calling, "Come and worship."

Oh, visit the earth,
 ask her to join the dance!
Deck her out in spring showers,
 fill the God-River with living water.
Paint the wheat fields golden.
 Creation was made for this!
Drench the plowed fields,
 soak the dirt clods
With rainfall as harrow and rake
 bring her to blossom and fruit.
Snow-crown the peaks with splendor,
 scatter rose petals down your paths,

All through the wild meadows, rose petals.
Set the hills to dancing,
Dress the canyon walls with live sheep,
a drape of flax across the valleys.
Let them shout, and shout, and shout!
Oh, oh, let them sing!

Benediction

God bless us in this time of travel, adventure, exploration, and rest. May we be open to seeing God in everything around us, in everyone we meet, and in ourselves. May we love God in these many iterations of God's abundant creation, and may we spread that love everywhere we go. Amen.

Siyahamba

We are walking in the light of God.
We are walking in the light of God.
We are walking in the light of God.
We are walking in the light of God.
We are walking, walking,
We are walking, oh-ho
We are walking in the light of God.
We are walking, walking,
We are walking, oh-ho
We are walking in the light of God.

We are singing....

We are dancing....

Use this space to draw a picture of something fun you did outdoors this summer.