

Sunday School at Home: Earth Sunday



Dear Friends,

April 22 is Earth Day! On the fourth Sunday of this Easter season, we'll celebrate with songs, prayers, and scripture about the earth. Which is appropriate! Certainly, the earth is infused with God's liturgy and singing back if we pay attention.

Psalm 148 is a favorite song with its sweeping praise of the Creator. This psalm includes us among God's works, right in there with sea monsters and cedar trees and creatures that creep, and even though we

tend to see ourselves as distinct from all these other beauties. Often, we imagine a gap that "others" the rest of creation. We imagine a superiority that subjugates the earth. These "other" gaps pop up like weeds here and everywhere: between countries, religions, cultures, races, neighbors...

There's a Latin American hymn with the chorus, "God is not in heaven. God is in our brothers and sisters." Some theologians have invited us to think of everything in creation as brother and sister. Some have invited us to think of the earth as Christ's body. All hope this emphasis closes any gaps we've imagined by tying our sense of ourselves and our actions toward all creation more intimately and literally to Jesus' words: "What you do to the least of these, you do to me."

One of this year's Earth Sunday themes is "A New Heaven and A New Earth" and it invites us into this more intimate understanding of mutuality and interdependence. It specifically invites us to a wider understanding of environmental justice that addresses the health of all living things including our very own human health, sees our treatment of the environment choked by weeds of racism, and shouts that our actions (or inactions) determine the welfare of our children. If we hadn't understood that before, a pandemic certainly made it perfectly clear. COVID-19 has given us a dramatic overview of issues such as racism, health inequity, and economic disparity. It has shown us how fragile and interconnected our society really is. This year's Earth Sunday hope is that as we close those gaps we keep imagining and come closer to the people and other parts of earth that are suffering the most, as we touch the world's suffering within ourselves, we will grow closer to God's purpose and calling that were breathed into all life on the first day of creation.

Would it change the way you walked the world if you thought of it as part of the body of Christ? Would it change the way you saw someone if you called them sister or brother?

Listening for God: This week create a worship space by using a white cloth as the season of Easter continues. Add something green and beautiful. Tulips are everywhere right now.

Talk a bit... Read Psalm 148 together from a favorite Bible. This psalm says (commands, actually) "praise!" 12 times! In scripture, repetition usually means: This is important!

- Look and listen to the list of things being praised. What's your favorite? What would you add that is missing? Your top 3? Your top 12?
- See below for some creatures that might deserve some prayers as well as praise. These are just some endangered species, struggling to survive because of our pollution, overdevelopment in their habitats, over hunting, pesticides, climate change...Human actions that aren't very praiseworthy. The Endangered Species Act meant to give these creatures a chance at survival, but in recent years it has been weakened. This isn't only bad for other creatures; it's bad for humanity, too. The web of life—or list of life in Psalm 148--connects us all. It's like a wound in one part of our body can affect or infect our whole body.
- Make a list of things you can do, not just to shout praises, but to live praise for God's creation and to heal the world even a little. Your top 3? Your top 12?

Try these: Just like the best way to break down barriers between people is to get to know them face to face, the best way to build appreciation for God's creation is getting out there and experiencing it. (Bonus: Enjoying nature has built-in social distancing.) A simple activity might be going on an outdoor scavenger hunt. If you go with a child, all you need is paper, pencil and a clipboard.

Here are 12 ideas for your scavenger hunt list (Remember: Don't disturb the earth. Notice, appreciate and maybe draw instead.)

- three kinds of leaves
- a flower
- a spider web
- a smooth rock
- something to climb
- a seed
- moss
- a feather
- a squirrel
- something you can eat
- something that smells good, and
- something blue

Or go [here](#) for other really good ideas about earth activities and experiments to do with kids.

OR, if you can't go out, consider going on an eco-friendly virtual field trip from your couch. Here is one to a [Finnish forest](#).

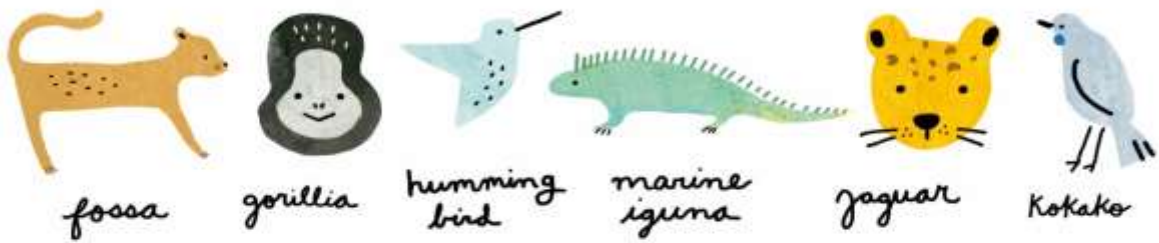
OR, in this time when we still can't quite fully embrace because of COVID, try this favorite idea: [tree hugging](#)! According to experts in Iceland, to get the most out of your embrace close your eyes, lean your cheek up against the trunk and feel the warmth and the currents flowing from the tree and into you...5 mins. a day is recommended.

Share some tree hugging time as a blessing with each other! When you're done, say thanks to the tree and amen to God.

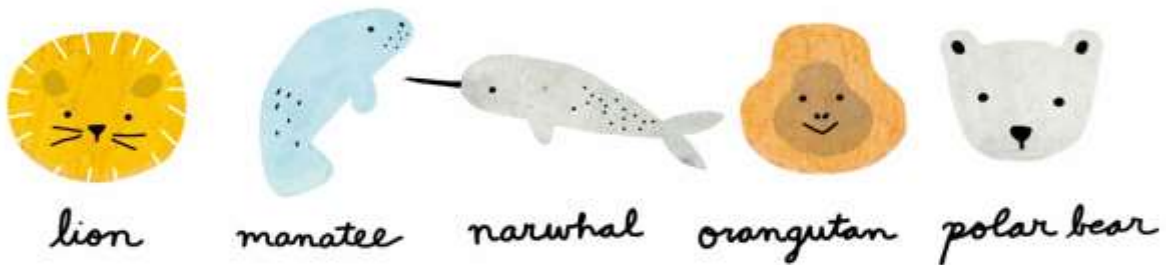
Endangered Animals ABC's



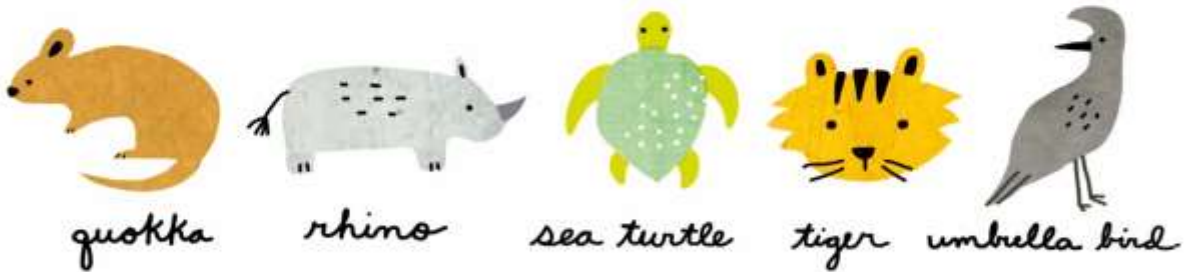
american alligator bumble bee chinchilla dhole elephant



fossa gorilla hummingbird marine iguana jaguar kokako



lion manatee narwhal orangutan polar bear



quokka rhino sea turtle tiger umbrella bird



vaquita whale shark pararge xiphia wild yak grevy's zebra



so that they may abound on the earth...
Genesis 8:17