

Lectionary Scriptures 2,450 words  
in message / liturgy: none

Additional Scripture references: Genesis 1: 1 - 19 & 31, & 2: 1 - 3  
Romans 8: 22

Key songs: VU 226 For the Beauty of the Earth  
VU 227 For the Fruit of All Creation  
MV 30 It's a Song of Praise to the Maker  
MV 3 River  
VU 242 Let All Things Now Living

Additional music: Bright and Beautiful (arr. Mark Hayes)  
All Things Bright and Beautiful (John Rutter)  
What a Wonderful World

Literary references: "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer

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## **What a Wonderful World**

Everyone knows the song we used as our prelude this morning – What a Wonderful World.

I see trees of green  
Red roses too  
I see them bloom  
For me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world

Then we hear about the blue skies, the white clouds, the bright day, the dark night, people shaking hands, babies crying... in other words, everything around us.

It's hard to think about the song without smiling, and that's the point.

The song was written in 1967 by George Weiss and Bob Thiele, who was Louis Armstrong's producer at ABC Records.

In his 2005 book, *What A Wonderful World: A Lifetime Of Recordings*, Thiele said that the song was intended as a reassuring antidote to the mounting problems facing America in the late 60s; a time defined by what he described as "the deepening national traumas of the Kennedy assassination, Vietnam, racial strife, and turmoil everywhere."

After hearing Thiele's demo tape of "What A Wonderful World," Armstrong was keen to record the tune but Larry Newton, the president of ABC, purportedly hated it and vetoed the idea. Despite Newton's protests, Armstrong secretly began recording the song in Las Vegas immediately after a show there in September 1967.

Then a problem came up: Larry Newton had come to Vegas to get some promotional photographs of the singer/trumpeter and, when he found out about the recording session, he tried to shut it down. Thiele ended up locking him out, but Newton got his revenge by refusing to promote the single when it was released in America, so it sold poorly.

Though it flopped in the US, in other places around the world, especially in Europe, "What A Wonderful World" was hugely successful; it reached No. 1 in the UK, where it sold 600,000 copies during a 29-week chart run.

Armstrong re-recorded "What A Wonderful World" in 1970, a year before his death, adding a spoken intro. Then in 1988, the song was back in the charts when its appearance on the soundtrack to the hit movie *Good Morning Vietnam* brought it to the attention of a new generation of listeners. Eleven years later, it

was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. Since then, a diverse array of cover versions - from Tony Bennett to Joey Ramone and Celine Dion to the Flaming Lips - have helped to cement "What A Wonderful World"'s iconic status.

Decades after its original release, Louis Armstrong's "What A Wonderful World" continues to inspire through its timeless message of love, peace, and harmony. For Armstrong, it told a story of possibility. "It seems to me, it ain't the world that's so bad, but what we're doing to it," he said on the intro to his 1970 version of the song. "All I'm saying is, see what a wonderful world it would be, if only we'd give it a chance."

The images found in the song echo much of what we heard in our reading from the book of Genesis this morning as well.

On the first day, God separated the light from the darkness. We hear this in the song's second verse where we hear of the "bright blessed day" and the "dark sacred night." It's almost as if the lyrics were taken directly from the Hebrew Bible.

In fact, of course, it was the separation of light and darkness that created the concept of day and night in the first place. "And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day."

(Incidentally, the fact that evening is listed first is why, in a number of other religious traditions including Judaism, the day begins at sundown - because that's how it was first explained in the Bible - and why people forget that Jewish holidays start the evening before and continue until sundown the next day)

On the second day, the water was separated from the sky. The third day brought the land, and the "trees of green" that Armstrong sang about.

On the fourth day, we got the sun and the moon and the stars. The fifth day gave us birds and fish. On the sixth day, the land animals were created, and then, of ultimate interest to us - us!

The reading in Genesis wraps up with verse 31:

**31** God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

And concludes with the first 3 verses of chapter 2:

**1** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

**2** By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

**3** Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

By this time, God needed a rest. Quite frankly, I often feel like I need a rest after working on one job for just one day, let alone creating an entire world in six days.

Sometimes, we do take the time to marvel at the creation all around us.

But sometimes, we're too busy going about our daily lives, and we don't notice what is right in front of us.

Today marks the second Sunday of "Creation Time" and if you're thinking "I've never heard of Creation Time - what is it?" then you're not alone.

Most people are aware of the major seasons of the Church Year. We have Advent – the time of preparation before Christmas. This covers the 4 Sundays before Christmas Day, and although many people think of this as part of Christmas, it isn't. Unless you're in retail, in which case Christmas starts just after Hallowe'en.

We mark Advent by slowly moving into Christmas, and yes, we do tend to sing some Christmas carols, although we begin the first couple of Sundays with songs that are not so much about Christmas but preparing for it. Songs like "O Come O Come Emmanuel," "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus," "On Jordan's Bank," and "The Race That Long in Darkness Pined" are really Advent carols.

It is true that by the time we get into the third Sunday in Advent, we're in full Christmas mode – mostly because there is so much beloved Christmas music that we can't get it all in the very short Christmas season. Christmas season is the shortest in the Liturgical Year – it barely covers more than the traditional "12 days of Christmas" and runs from Christmas Eve until the Baptism of Christ on the Sunday after January 6<sup>th</sup>.

So although Epiphany starts after that, we cheat there too, and keep some Christmas music going for a couple more weeks.

Lent is next – the time of introspection and preparation for Easter. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts 40 days, although people often get the math wrong here, forgetting that the Sundays don't count in the 40. Adding the six Sundays gives us 46 days until Holy Saturday.

Easter season lasts until Pentecost Sunday, and then the season of Pentecost covers the remainder of the church year. This is pretty much half the year, and is typically everything from June through late November.

So if that's the whole church year, then when is Creation Time?

Creation time isn't a season, but a special part of the season of Pentecost.

And if it still sounds a bit unfamiliar, that's because it's relatively new - it came into existence in 1989.

In 1989 the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, who is the leader of the Eastern Orthodox church, suggested that September 1<sup>st</sup>, the first day of the Eastern Orthodox Church year, should be observed as a day "of protection of the natural environment". Ten years later the European Christian Environmental Network widened this proposal, urging churches to adopt a Time for Creation stretching from 1 September to the feast of St Francis on 4 October and this was endorsed by the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania in 2007, which recommended that the period "be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change".

It is a very grass-roots, ecumenical movement that spans all major Christian churches who have, progressively, decided to incorporate Creation Time in their worship and study each year.

There is usually a theme each year, promoted by the "Season of Creation Advisory Committee," an ecumenical steering committee composed of representatives of more than a dozen world churches.

This year's theme is "To Hope and Act with Creation" and the promoters give the following challenge:

*In the letter of Paul the apostle to the Romans, the biblical image pictures the Earth as a Mother, groaning as in childbirth (Rom 8:22). Francis of Assisi understood this when he referred to the Earth as our sister and our mother in his Canticle of Creatures. The times we live in show that we are not relating to the Earth as a gift from our Creator, but rather as a resource to be used.*

*And yet, there is hope and the expectation for a better future. To hope in a biblical context does not mean to stand still and quiet, but rather groaning, crying, and actively striving for new life amidst the struggles. Just as in childbirth, we go through a period of intense pain, but new life springs forth.*

Although not a full season in its own right, it does have its own liturgical colour – orange. This is the colour of harvest, fruitfulness, and joy, and the season segues neatly into Thanksgiving.

The United Church of Canada began offering resources for celebrating Creation Time in 2011.

Whether you follow any of the official “Creation Time” resources, or you just take some time to think about creation, it’s a good way to reconnect with our Creator’s purpose for us.

As I said earlier, we tend to forget the beauty and majesty of creation, even when we are in the midst of it, for a number of reasons.

We are busy people. We rush from one thing to another and everything in between is in our way getting to the next thing.

We live in houses, and most of us work in buildings. For most people, time spent in the parts of the world God created (as opposed to the ones we built ourselves) is minimal.

Although Bolton used to be very much an agricultural community, it mainly isn't anymore. Those in agriculture have a connection to the land, as well as spending much of their time outdoors. Farmers work with the plants and the animals, and are acutely aware of the cycle of life, whether it is planting, nurturing and harvesting, or the animal life cycle from birth through death.

Most of us don't farm anymore, and many people have never been on a farm. The closest most people get to the process is gardening in their own home, if they even have a garden. Nowadays many people live in apartments or condos and if there is a flower bed or some grass, somebody else tends it for them.

So the challenge of Creation Time is this: think consciously about what surrounds you. Think about creation. Think about the birds and the fish, the horses and the cows, the flowers and the trees. Think about the water and the rocks, the sun and the moon and the stars.

These are all things we couldn't create if we tried. And humankind has tried.

We can, in a limited way, work with what God has already created. We can breed animals to reinforce certain traits. We can move earth around, cut down trees, and use the wood to build things on top of the earth. We can pump the water from one place to another.

But we can't create those things.

The famous Joyce Kilmer poem "Trees" is one I think most have heard. It goes like this:



*I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.*

*A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;*

*A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;*

*A tree that may in Summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;*

*Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.*

*Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.*

It is a little bit tongue-in-cheek ... the poet refers to himself as a "fool" who can make poems, but of course, can't make trees.

The poem was published in 1914 in Kilmer's book "Trees and other poems" and proves that Kilmer is no fool... but a person able to use his God-given talent to produce poetry that others will read and, perhaps, be inspired by.

Talents are another aspect of creation. On the sixth day, we are told that all animals - including us - were created.

There are only a few words devoted to the creation of humankind - essentially one verse, simply saying we were created, and then we were blessed and given some instructions about ruling over the animals, being fruitful, and filling the earth.

Implicit in that creation is that we were created essentially as we are today - not just flesh and blood, but humans with the ability to reason, to educate ourselves, to share what we have, and to invent new things.

That last bit is important - because along with all the other talents God gave us is the most important one - the ability to create. We can invent new things, and create new technologies, and find new ways to do new things. We can come up with systems of government, and churches, and institutions. We can synthesize food from various sources that weren't the ones in the Book of Genesis, and we've even learned to split atoms to generate power that we rely on every day.

In short, God created us and gave us the ability to continue to create.

That's as close as we're ever going to get to Godhood.

And yet, as the poem says... only God can make a tree.

All that we do, and all that we have, is reliant on what God first created for us, and continues to create - and on the abilities we were given when created. Our very nature is part of God's creation.

So when you next go outside, take a look around, and marvel at the creation you see.

For God has given us so many gifts - the earth, the natural world, our friends and families, and all the talents we possess.

God created.

And it is still very good!