

Wilderness/Outback Sunday

This week's readings depict the wilderness as a place of spiritual sustenance. It prepares Jesus for the rest of his ministry; Joel recognizes the earth's distress in the wilderness; in Psalm 18, the wilderness shows God's care; in Romans, all creation is one. All of the texts remind us that the wilderness teaches us who we are.

Focus scripture: Romans 8:18–27

The theme of the oneness of creation is seen in sharp relief in Romans 8:18–27. All creation groans for the coming of Jesus into the world. Since all of the passages this week emphasize that the wilderness is both separate and one with all created things, it raises a question: what would creation gaining freedom look like? What, together, could we birth into the world? The hope spoken of by Paul in this passage is a hope built during a time of sadness and destruction. It is a hope in the midst of a repressive empire. It is not an idle hope, but one that acknowledges the immense pain and suffering of creation, and hopes because hope is the only thing that might end the pain.

It is often surprising, in an age when wilderness is such a threatened territory around the world, to see the dynamic and spiritually charged relationship that the characters of the Bible have with their wild spaces. **Joel 1:8–10, 17–20**, for instance, notices that the ruins of the fields and cities of Israel mirror the distress of the wild places, where the wild animals thirst and fires rage. In a different lens, Joel's words are not surprising at all—they sound like the lament of a person devastated by drought and wildfire. When comparing these two epochs, one wonders what the wilderness meant to Joel. Was it a wasteland? A harsh place unfit for humans? A place where God is found? All of the above? Regardless of what the wilderness meant to him, one thing is clear: the suffering of the wilderness is one with the suffering of the human world.

Psalm 18:16–19 shows how the wilderness not only mirrors human life but provides signs of God's work in our lives. Here, we experience all creation in a relationship with God. The imagery depicts a world of grandeur and grace. The testament that creation provides is convincing and compelling. It seems almost as if the wilderness is, in its grandeur, a kind of temple to God in itself.

In the midst of this pain, we might wonder what went through Jesus' mind in **Matthew 3:13–4:2** (or Mark 1:9–13) as he went to the wilderness after his baptism? As many other humans do, Jesus uses the wilderness as a quiet retreat from which he could draw spiritual strength for the ministry that would be his short life's work. His time in the wilderness was surely a time of intense beauty and grandeur – but also, we know, a time of suffering and temptation. Perhaps this was a time of self-discovery.

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People make many distinctions between cities and forests, society and wilderness. But perhaps these passages have a different message – that the city mirrors the country. The pain of the city mirrors the pain of the wilderness. When the wilderness is threatened, we too are threatened; when the wilderness flourishes, so do we. We know ourselves when we have braved with our full hearts what seems to lie completely outside of our lives – when we truly embrace the nonhuman world. What would it mean to truly see the wildernesses, both physical and spiritual, of our lives?

Season of Creation (Year A)

Focus scripture Romans 8:18–27

Additional scriptures

Joel 1:8–10, 17–20

Psalm 18:6–19

Matthew 3:13—4:2 or

Mark 1:9–13



Resources based on
semi-continuous
readings of the *Revised Common
Lectionary* can be found online at
www.seasonsonline.ca/RCLresources.

**Loving God, we
thank you for the
wild, beautiful,
eternally changing
world that is always
beyond our under-
standing. In the
wilderness, help
us to find wonder
and awe, to mourn
when the land calls
us to mourn, and to
rejoice when it calls
us to rejoice. Amen.**

Lecture Connection

links current events
with this week's
scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and
click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Some of the children in your group may not have experienced being in the wilderness or outback, though they will have seen pictures of these uninhabited places or watched television shows or movies about them. This week's session offers an opportunity to imagine what the wilderness/outback might say about suffering in the world and God's plans for good.

Younger children in this age group are developing a sense of empathy and are able to understand when others are hurting. Older children are becoming more knowledgeable about the world and the suffering of those affected by pollution, war, or

hunger. Though they may feel powerless against the large and complex problems, they are beginning to understand what it means to accompany another in their hurt. Pray that the children may be encouraged by the assurance that destructive ways are not God's ways and that God has good things in mind for the whole of creation.

Note: A description for Wilderness is "natural wild places where there a very few if any people" and for Outback is "a distant place without fences, where there a very few if any people." During this session use the word "wilderness" or "outback," choosing the term that is familiar and suits your location.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Romans 8:18–27, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 19).
- ☐ Set a worship space with aqua cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark in focus passage, and a small bag of clean, dry gravel or coarse sand.
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ☐ Bring, if possible, the song "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ☐ Bring images of wilderness or outback, cut from magazines or nature calendars.

Engage

- ☐ Bring resource sheet "[A Suffering Creation](#)."
- ☐ **Game group:** recording of lively music, drawings of sad face and happy face, resource sheet "[Season of Creation Games](#)" (p. 100)

- ☐ **Research group:** copies of resource sheet "[Digging Deeper](#)"
- ☐ Bring large circle of grey poster board and used magazines.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ☐ **Creation zone:** used magazines and newspapers, used cardboard
- ☐ **Nature zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Sighing with God](#)," long cardboard tubes, kitchen foil, small beads or clean dry gravel; cut foil into pieces twice the length of the tubes; make a sample.
- ☐ **Art zone:** fingerpaints, fingerpainting paper, painting smocks or shirts
- ☐ **Craft zone:** paper plates, yellow construction paper, yarn
- ☐ **Outreach zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Children Like You](#)" (p. 101)

Bless

- ☐ Bring, if possible, song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



September 20, 2020

Wilderness/Outback Sunday

Scripture

Romans 8:18–27

FOCUS To be assured of God's goodness and have hope for all creation

Gather

Welcome the children and remind them that we are in the Season of Creation, a time to celebrate God's beautiful creation. Introduce any newcomers to the group.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and point out the aqua cloth, a colour that reminds us of the green-blue colour of the planet Earth. Explain that this is Wilderness/Outback Sunday, a day to wonder what the wild places of the world might have to say to us.

Lead the group in the following litany:

Leader: Come, let us celebrate God!

(Invite a child to light the candle.)

God created the wild places of the world.

(Invite a child to sprinkle the contents of the bag around the candle.)

God gives life and breath to everything.

All: Thank you, God!

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray *(Invite children to repeat each line after you.)*

Creator God,

we thank you for the wilderness/outback places and

all that you have made. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Show the pictures wilderness/outback areas and invite children to imagine what it would be like to be there. Offer a definition of these areas (see the "Focus for" section) and ask:

■ **If you went into the wilderness/outback what might you smell, see, and hear?**

Invite any children who have visited the wilderness/outback to share their experiences.

■ **What challenges do you think there might be when people go into these areas?**

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Romans. Explain that this book is a letter written by Paul, one of Jesus' followers, to the Christians living in Rome after the time of Jesus. Invite children to listen to see what this week's story says about creation, and think of the wilderness/outback and all creation waiting.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[A Suffering Creation](#)," partly based on Romans 8:18–27, to tell the story.

Wondering At the time that Paul wrote this letter, followers of Jesus were often mistreated and suffered for their faith and for following in the way of Jesus. Invite discussion on the following questions:

■ **What is the good news in Paul's letter for the followers of Jesus in Rome?**

■ **How do you think the wilderness/outback is suffering today?**

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Game group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to imagine what the world will look like filled with God's loving ways. Create a circle of chairs, taping a sad face drawing onto the back of one and a happy face on another. Follow the directions on the resource sheet "[Season of Creation Games](#)" (p. 100) to play the "Sad ways, God's ways" game.

Research group *(for older children)* This group will explore the focus passage more deeply. Distribute the copies of the resource sheet "[Digging Deeper](#)" and ask for volunteers to read the verses. After each section is read, discuss the question with it, using the hints provided.

Reporting Invite the game group to name some of "God's ways" and invite the research group to share what they have discovered about the focus passage.

The Bible story and us

Wilderness/outback collage Look at the Forest and Land collages from the past two weeks, and then invite children to create a "Wilderness/Outback collage" by tearing out coloured pieces of paper from magazines to glue onto the grey poster board circle to form sandy or gravelly areas, shrubs, rocks, sun, small furry animals, snake shapes. (Note: there is no need to make an actual picture, just make a blend of colours to suggest an area of wilderness.)

As they work, invite children to think about the wilderness/outback places that are in your area, such as dry deserts or forested mountains.

On this Sunday we listen to the voice of the Wilderness/Outback.

■ **What might these places of the world say about God?**

■ **What might they be asking us to do to help care for this part of creation?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

❑ **Creation zone: Posters** There are places in creation that are suffering. Invite children to name problems that particularly concern them. Have them make posters about their concerns, making collages of images and words cut from newspapers and magazine and gluing these onto recycled pieces of cardboard. Make a display in the church building, with a message encouraging the rest of the congregation to take action to care for creation.



❑ **Nature zone: Sighing sticks** Creation often sighs as it waits for the good things God intends. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Sighing with God](#)" and show the sample. Help children to follow instructions to make their own "sighing sticks." Try the prayer activity suggested on the bottom of the sheet.

❑ **Art zone: Abstract paintings** The wilderness/outback places in creation are suffering in many parts of the world. Provide fingerpaints, paper, and painting shirts. As you read again the paraphrase of the Romans passage on the resource sheet "[A Suffering Creation](#)" invite children to create abstract paintings as they listen, allowing their fingertips to express the emotions of suffering and hope in the reading.

❑ **Craft zone: Sun hanging** *(for younger children)* We wait with all creation for the good things God has planned. Distribute paper plates and invite children to draw smiling faces of hope and print the words, "God has good things in mind" around bottom edges of their plates. Have children cut "rays" from construction paper and print on each one something good they hope to see happen in our world. Staple the rays around the edge of plates and punch holes in the top of plates for hanging with yarn loops. Talk about places to hang these hopeful reminders.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Discussion** While we wait for the good things God has planned for us, we can work to bring God's hope to a hurting world. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Children Like You" (p. 101) and read these two stories together. Invite discussion



on the questions and share stories of other projects group members have heard about or in which they have participated. Encourage the children to take the resource sheets home, so that they can continue exploring these sites with their families.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray Invite children to repeat each line after you:

Thank you, God, for the wild places in our world.
May we remember that we are part
of a giant web of creation. Amen.

Blessing Offer the following blessing: "Always remember that God's hope is in us and all around us."

Reflect

What signs of hope seemed to be important to the children? What kind of suffering seemed to touch the children's hearts?



A Suffering Creation

including Romans 8:18–27

Copy
the words
from Romans
onto a paper
and make a
scroll to read
during the
story.

As Paul wrote, he remembered the walk across the hot, sandy desert wilderness. He remembered going to so many cities where followers of Jesus were eager to hear more about God's way. He remembered seeing the little desert critters scamper into holes when they heard his footsteps.

The wilderness/outback is a wild kind of place, but it is a special place too. Without humans to disturb it, it is awesome. The animals and plants in the wilderness need only God's care, not ours. When we get too close, we disturb the natural cycle of life in it. Then it moans its sadness.

Paul thought about the wilderness/outback and all creation. Paul wrote to his friends in Rome:

I know you are suffering now. But the wonders that will come are far better than how you are living today. Really, all creation is waiting for God to make things right. God made things this way so creation would be set free from the decay it knows today. We will share in God's glory with creation one day. We may cry now, but God's Spirit prays for us, even when we cannot find the words to pray for ourselves or for creation. This gives us hope and the patience to wait for God.

When Paul's friends in Rome read this letter, they lived with hope. When we read this letter, we can live with hope too. And creation can show us the way.



Romans 8:18-19

I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us. In fact, all creation is eagerly waiting for God to show who his children are.

- Paul is excited about what will happen when the good things God has planned come to be. What words or phrases might you use to describe the coming good times?

(Hint: Check out Isaiah 11:4-9 for some ideas.)

Romans 8:20-21

Meanwhile, creation is confused, but not because it wants to be confused. God made it this way in the hope that creation would be set free from decay and would share in the glorious freedom of his children.

- What in our world seems to be confused? What might be seen as decay?

(Hint: Check out Genesis 3:17-19 for some ideas.)

Romans 8:22-23

We know that all creation is still groaning and is in pain, like a woman about to give birth. The Spirit makes us sure about what we will be in the future. But now we groan silently, while we wait for God to show that we are his children. This means that our bodies will also be set free.

- What words or phrases might you use to describe what it might be like to be waiting for your child to be born?

Romans 8:24-25

And this hope is what saves us. But if we already have what we hope for, there is no need to keep on hoping. However, we hope for something we have not yet seen, and we patiently wait for it.

- What words or phrases might you use to describe how you feel as you wait for something wonderful to come?

(Hint: Think about what it is like waiting for something exciting to happen, maybe your birthday or Christmas. You haven't had it yet, but you are absolutely certain it's coming!)

Romans 8:26-27

In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people.

- What message of hope does Paul bring to people who are facing hard times?

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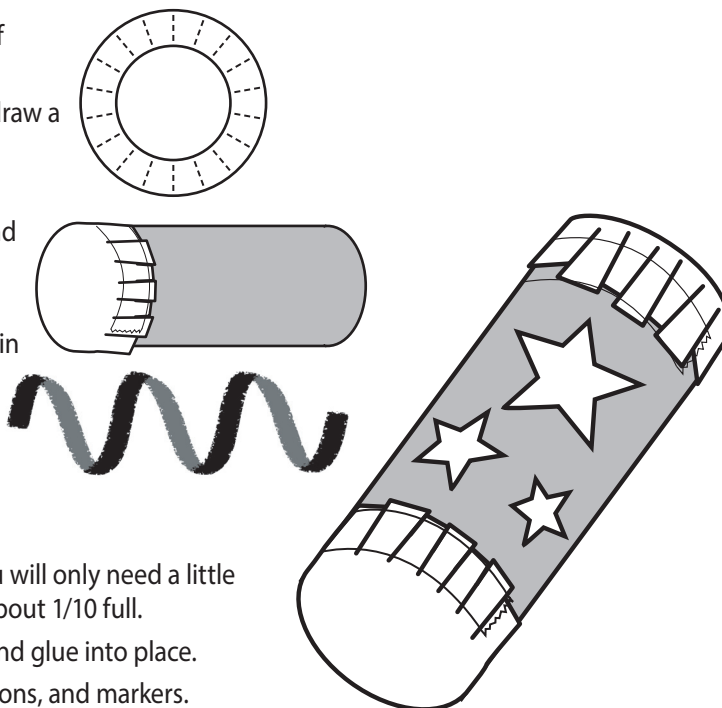


Sighing with God

In our story today there was lots of sighing and groaning. The wilderness was sighing, creation was groaning, and the Spirit was praying with deep, deep sighs that spoke straight to God's heart.

Instructions

1. Trace around the end of your tube onto a piece of brown construction paper.
2. Draw a bigger circle around that circle and then draw a lot of spokes between the two circles.
3. Cut along the spokes.
4. Put glue on the spokes, place the circle on one end of the tube and press the gluey spokes onto one end of your tube. Secure with tape.
5. Crunch the kitchen foil lengthways into a long, thin shape.
6. Form into a spiral spring shape. Stretch it until it's a little longer than the tube.
7. Gently slide the spring into the tube. Push the spring down until it fits inside the tube.
8. Pour the gravel from your bag into your tube. You will only need a little to make a good noise. The tube should only be about 1/10 full.
9. Make another cap for the other end of the tube and glue into place.
10. Decorate your tube with construction paper, crayons, and markers.



To make your stick sigh, hold the tube upright with the gravel in the bottom, and slowly turn it over.

Now that you have made this incredible stick, what will you do with it? Here are two ideas:

1. If you are feeling sad about something you can use the stick to help show your feelings.
2. You can use the stick to pray about sad things.

Praying about sad things

- Think about the thing that is causing your sadness. It might be something sad that is happening to you or someone you care about, or it could be something sad that is happening to Earth.
- Talk to God about your sadness; you might say something like this, "Dear God, I am thinking about (fill in the blank) and it makes me sad." Then use your sighing stick to sigh. You may want to sigh more than once. That's okay; you can sigh as many times as you need.
- Imagine the Spirit sighing right beside you. Use your stick to help you hear the Spirit's sighs. The Spirit's sighs are a special prayer to God.
- Finish by saying, "Amen," which is a short way of saying, "That is my prayer too."

How will you use your stick?

Season of Creation Games

September 6 – Web of connection

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Hold the loose end of the ball of yarn, and throw the ball to a child. Invite her or him to hold on to the yarn, call out her or his name, the identity of her or his forest friend, and throw the ball to someone else. Keep going until everyone is holding a piece of the yarn that is taking on the shape of the web. Look at the web and marvel at the amazing way that everyone and all the forest friends are connected. Repeat the process with the

children naming other people they know (such as family or friends) or the names of other things you might find in the forest. Look at the growing web of connections and observe that we are connected to each other and the whole of God's creation. Run the yarn several times around the outside of the circle. Explain that this reminds us of what we heard in the story. God is very close. God is deep inside and all around.

September 13 – Caring for the land

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Hold up a small beach ball and explain that it is a reminder of our beautiful planet Earth with all its different landscapes. Invite children to begin tossing the ball around the circle. Whenever someone catches the ball,

ask him or her to offer a suggestion of one way that we can care for the land. After each suggestion encourage the whole group to say, "That's a great way to live in harmony with the land!"

September 20 – Sad ways, God's ways

Arrange the chairs in a circle and invite children to stand in a circle around them. Point out the chair marked with a sad face and chair marked with happy face. Play a recording of music and encourage the children to dance around the chairs. When the music stops, each player must sit on the chair nearest to her or him. Ask the child sitting in the chair with the

sad face to name one way that people might make creation sad (such as littering, polluting a river, cutting down too many trees, catching too many fish). Ask the child sitting in the chair with the happy face to offer an idea of how to live in God's ways (such as recycling, saving water, taking care of animals). Repeat the game several times.

September 27 – Water carry

Remind the children that in some places of the world people don't have water in their homes and need to carry water from a nearby well, or from a river or lake that is sometimes far away. Often it is the job of the children to carry the water. Invite the group to see what it might feel like to carry water. Place a large empty container at one end of the room (or outside area) and another container full of water

at the opposite end. Give each child a small bucket. The object of the game is to carry their buckets to the opposite end, fill it with water from the large container, and carry the water back without spilling it to empty into the first container. Continue until all the water has been transferred from one container to the other. Discuss the experience together.



children Like **You**

We can work with God to bring signs of God's hope to a hurting world. All around the world children like you are working with their communities to do amazing things.



In Canada

When Hannah Taylor was five, she and her mother saw a homeless person eating food out of a garbage can. Hannah had many questions about what they had seen. "Why, why, why? If everybody shared what they have, would that cure homelessness?"

Again Hannah and her mother saw a homeless person wandering in the streets, carrying everything in a grocery cart. This time Hannah decided to do something. She went to her teacher and asked if they could raise money to help people who had no home. That was the beginning of something amazing.

By the time Hannah was 8 years old she had started the Ladybug Foundation. She began travelling to schools, businesses, and organizations all over Canada to talk about the plight of homeless people. Hannah has spoken to thousands of people and through her efforts, over 3 million dollars has been raised for projects across Canada that provide shelter, food, and safety for homeless people. Hannah is now 24 years old and has also written "Ruby's Hope," a children's book that inspires hope and caring. One of her goals is to teach people that everyone can make a difference in the lives of others.



In the United States

When Austin Beauchamp was six years old, he came home from school one day and asked his mom for

new mittens, ones that were "cool." His mom told him that there were 800 homeless children in Green Bay alone who didn't have warm homes and mittens. The next day he came home from school with an assignment to bring back 100 of something: cherrios, smarties, anything. Austin asked his mother if he could bring 100 hats and mittens for the children who didn't have any. After his mom posted about his project on Facebook, Austin eventually collected over 500 hats and mittens, which got distributed to different schools in the area.

That's how Austin's Closet got started. Austin with help from his friends began collecting clothes, dishes, TVs, mattress, beds, for needy families.

Something to talk about

- **How did Hannah and Charlie bring hope to others?**
- **What might your group do to bring hope to the world?**
- **Where do you see a need, and what might you do to help?**

For more stories of children making a difference, go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click the Links tab. See links for September 20, 2020.

