

“Let the Earth Sing Again”

Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6

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Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Beginning this year, the *Revised Common Lectionary* has designated the first Sunday of September as “Creation in Christ Sunday.” In keeping with this theme, today’s sermon addresses environmental justice and God’s plan to renew the earth.

In her 1962 book *Silent Spring*, marine biologist Rachel Carson exposed how pesticides—particularly DDT—damaged the environment. First used during World War II to fight malaria, DDT was later used across the United States, poisoning American aquatic food chains. *Silent Spring* sparked the modern environmental movement, awakening Americans to the urgent need for clean air, clear water, and the protection of endangered species.

Today, we face that same threat in a different form: **climate change**. The Earth is warming at an alarming rate, and we are already living with the consequences: melting ice caps, retreating glaciers, historic droughts, severe storms, and rising seas.

Just recently, *Smithsonian Magazine* reported on a devastating flood along the Nepal–Tibet border. Over a thousand people died. Thousands more went missing. Why did it happen? Scientists point to warming temperatures. Climate change melts and weakens Himalayan glaciers. Mountain slopes turn soft and collapse. When they give way, catastrophic floods rush downstream, as happened recently in Nepal. As glaciologist Dr. Twila Moon put it, *“There’s no question that this event was made more likely because of climate change.”*¹

From the biblical standpoint, this breaks the heart. What has happened to nature is troubling. We have not only destroyed the ecosystem; we have also silenced creation itself. Scripture tells us that **creation was wired to**

¹ “What Triggered the Devastating Flood in Nepal and Tibet, and Are We Due for More in the Future? What Scientists Know So Far,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 31, 2026.

sing. Creation declares the glory of God! But through our destruction, we have diminished nature's ability to sing God's praise.

In Psalm 148, the psalmist summons the entire universe to praise God. He starts in the heavens,

*Praise him, sun and moon; praise him,
all you shining stars! and you waters above the heavens!*

Then he turns to the earth below. He commands the roaring seas and majestic mountains, the birds in the air, the fish in the deep, even the snow, hail, and stormy winds.

But the summons to sing in praise to God the Creator doesn't stop with nature. **Human beings are called to step up and join the song** as the psalmist calls on kings of the earth and all people to praise the name of the Lord!

It is easy to dismiss the idea that all creation was wired to sing as mere poetic exaggeration. But Old Testament scholar Elizabeth Achtemeier argues this is no exaggeration. In her book *Nature, God, and Pulpit*, she points to a fascinating discovery by biologist Lewis Thomas: termites communicate by "beating their heads against the floor in the dark, resonating corridors of their nests." Even more surprising, their drumming is highly organized and follows regular rhythmic patterns.²

It isn't just termites; bats and humpback whales create music, too. Bats emit high-pitched sounds to navigate, but they also produce bell-like notes while hanging upside down. Humpback whales produce low-frequency sounds that can travel many miles underwater. When they leap and crash back into the waves, it looks like jubilation, celebrating the joy of life itself.³

We could go on. We know birds sing, and it's not just for mating.

Long before science began to uncover the remarkable ways creatures communicate through sound, artists and poets sensed something sacred in nature's chorus. Folk singer John Denver spent much of his life drawing our

² Thomas, Lewis, "The Music of the Spheres, in *The Lives of a Cell* (Viking Press, 1974), pp. 20- 24.

³ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nature, God and Pulpit* (Eerdmans, 1992), 44.

attention to the Earth's beauty and melody. In his 1975 song "*Calypso*," Denver portrayed the sea as a place alive with wonder and praise, singing:

*"To sail on a dream on a crystal-clear ocean, to ride on the crest of a wild raging storm; To work in the service of life and the living
In search of the answers to questions unknown...Aye, Calypso, I sing
to your spirit."*

Denver understood that the oceans are more than bodies of salt water; they are living sanctuaries filled with praise.

So, if creation is a living sanctuary filled with praise, why are we tuning out all these voices in the natural world? Why are we silencing nature's choir?

In "*Rocky Mountain High*," John Denver grieved the damage people caused to the earth, wondering, "*why they try to tear the mountains down to bring in a couple more, more people, more scars upon the land.*" With this lament, he captured the heart of Psalm 148: creation has a voice—a song the Creator gave it. **And when we destroy creation, we silence part of that holy chorus.**

Today, the extent to which we have destroyed creation through pollution, deforestation, and climate change is staggering. Humans have already wiped out a third of the world's original forests,⁴ destroyed half of coral reefs⁵ while fossil fuels account for almost 90% of carbon emissions.⁶

But there is good news: eventually God will restore creation. God isn't abandoning this planet. Our passage in Revelation says, "Someday God will create "a new heaven and a new earth,"

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more (Rev. 21:1-2).

In biblical imagery, "the sea" represented untamed chaos, danger, and separation. Saying "the sea was no more" means chaos and destruction

⁴ Our World in Data, April 19, 2022.

⁵ NOAA Fisheries, August 26, 2026.

⁶ Our World in Data, November 21, 2024.

are finally defeated. Revelation promises "a new heaven and a new earth"—restoring creation to its pristine order and harmony.

New Testament scholar Barbara Rossing notes something crucial here. She argues that, contrary to what some Christians preach, Revelation does not say we will be "raptured" or snatched *away* from the earth. Instead, God brings heaven down to us, making the divine home right here on earth—a kind of "Rapture in reverse,"⁷ if you will.

Verse 3 says: "*See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them.*" This planet is not disposable. God doesn't toss this Earth in the trash and trade it for a new model once we break it.

The Greek word for "new" in Revelation 21:1 means "renewed" or "made new," not a completely "different" earth.⁸ Just as the apostle Paul describes resurrection as transforming our existing bodies rather than discarding them (Romans 8:19–23), God's ultimate vision is to restore and transform this earth, not abandon it.

The British author C.S. Lewis captured this beautifully at the end of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. When Lucy and her companion finally come into the "New Narnia" at the end of their journey, they haven't escaped to a different world. They're standing in the exact same land, with the same hills as those in their hometown, and the same homes, but everything is deeper, richer, and more radiant. The color blue is bluer. Every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more.

That is God's vision for creation—a vision early Christians saw set in motion through Jesus' resurrection. They believed that the resurrection began the process of transforming and restoring the earth into what New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan calls "the Great Divine Clean-Up."⁹ It is a process, not a single, sudden end-of-the-world event. This clean-up won't stop until this world is fully restored to a beauty and grandeur we have never seen before. That's God's promise of newness for nature. And God invites us to join in the restoration process. God isn't

⁷ Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Westview Press, 2004), 147.

⁸ Rossing, 7.

⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (HarpersCollins, 2004), 116-117.

planning to abandon the earth, and as partners in that renewal, we shouldn't either.

So how do we actually align ourselves with God's work in restoring creation? Perhaps, a good way to start is to practice *deep listening*. Go outside—maybe to your backyard or a nearby park—and turn off your phone to avoid interruptions. Sit quietly, close your eyes, and tune into whatever you hear: leaves rustling in the wind, insects buzzing, birds calling. Instead of tuning those out as background noise, try listening to them as creation praising its Creator, and just take a moment to sit in that worship.

May God's creative Spirit open our hearts and help us truly listen to the voices of nature around us. Thanks be to God. Amen.