

**Opening Music: 'Last Spring' Greig**

<https://youtu.be/7jleePfOo6Q>

**Welcome:** Good morning and Welcome, whether you are here in the church, joining us online, or watching on youtube at a later date. Welcome whoever you are, and however you are feeling, whatever you carry in your heart, and bring with you: cares, concerns or celebrations, sadness or joys, you are welcome.

However we join in, each one of us is part of our community, contributing by being connected in spirit, and all are equally valued. We begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. If you are at home and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

**Chalice Lighting:** *(Rev Audrey W. Vincent)*

We light this chalice this morning for earth, our home.

Earth abundant, source of what was before we were and will be after we are gone.

As each cell proves our common destiny, may we know earth, our mother of old, as our friend; as we were bred of dust and stars, may we know her fate as ours.

Blessed are our bonds to the earth,

Blessed are our bonds to all of life,

Blessed are our bonds to the Source of life itself.

**Opening Words:**

Theme of our Service this morning is for Earth Day, which is actually tomorrow. Earth Day, is a global event celebrating our home Planet Earth, and raising awareness of the threats to it, and what we humans can do to overcome them. Theme this year is 'Planet versus Plastic'

Our Opening words are an extract from the Jewish Declaration on nature from the meeting of leaders of the world faiths organized by WWF in Assisi in 1986:

"At the very beginning of time, humankind accepted responsibility before God for all creation ..... Humankind was commanded to behave towards the rest of creation with justice and compassion ..... Humanity always lives in tension between its power and the limit set by conscience. Some 20 centuries ago, they told a story of 2 men who were out on the water in a rowing boat. Suddenly one of them started to saw through the wood under his feet. He maintained it was his right to do whatever he wished with the place that belonged to him. The other answered him that they were both in the rowing boat together; the hole that he was making would sink them both ..... We have a responsibility to life, to defend it everywhere, not only against our own sins but also those of others..... We are all passengers together in this same fragile and glorious world. Let us safeguard our 'rowing boat' – and let us row together."

**1<sup>st</sup> Hymn:** P 128 'Our World is one world'

Our world is one world:

what touches one affects us all –  
the seas that wash us round about,  
the clouds that cover us,  
the rains that fall.

Our world is one world:

the thoughts we think affect us all –  
the way we build our attitudes,  
with love or hate, we make

Our world is one world:  
its ways of wealth affect us all –  
the way we spend, the way we share,  
who are the rich or poor,  
who stand or fall?

Our world is one world,  
just like a ship that bears us all –  
where fear and greed make many holes,  
but where our hearts can hear  
a different call.

### **Prayers:**

#### **1. Prayer for others and ourselves:**

Let us pause and hold in our thoughts & prayers those of our own church community and their loved ones, and all in our city, and throughout the wider world, who are experiencing illness, and difficult, sad or worrying times, whatever the causes.

We hold in our thoughts & prayers all whose lives have been lost or changed forever through violence due to political and social unrest, natural disasters, accident or plain misfortune. We think today especially of the continuing conflicts in Ukraine and in Gaza, involving dangerous tensions between the so called super powers, and potential for further outbreaks of violence in neighbouring countries. May those fleeing conflict, mostly the vulnerable: the young, the sick, women and the elderly, find sanctuary and peace. May the places to which they flee somehow find the strength and resources to provide what they need. May those claiming to be the leaders of all countries be blessed with compassion and wisdom to prevent further destruction.

May good sense and a desire for peace, prevail.

Let us pray that the tensions within our own society, can be resolved through dialogue, and discussion, so that everyone, whatever their differences, may co-exist peaceably.

Lets pause just for a few moments in the quietness of our own thoughts, to consider both the blessings and the trials of our own lives, and dedicate ourselves to sharing our blessings and to doing what we can to ease the trials of others .... *AMEN*

#### **2. Prayer by Dolores La Chappelle 'A Prayer of Thanks'**

We give away our thanks to the Earth  
Which gives us our home

We give away our thanks to the rivers and lakes  
Which give away their water.

We give our thanks to the trees  
Which give away their fruit and nuts.

We give away our thanks to the wind

We give away our thanks to the sun  
Who gives away warmth and light.

All beings on earth: the trees, the animals, the wind and the rivers giveaway to one another so all is in balance.

We give away our promise to begin to learn how to stay in balance with all the Earth. *AMEN*

**Story:** What happens to the plastic you throw away? ('The three plastic bottles' )  
by Emma Brice TED video  
[https://youtu.be/\\_6xINyWPpB8](https://youtu.be/_6xINyWPpB8)

**Reading:** from 'Positive News', read by Marianne  
"The online market place saving 'wonky' beauty products from landfill."  
By Robin Eveleigh.

The beauty industry's eye-watering waste problem is enough to make your mascara run – but a new online marketplace is tackling the issue head on by offering cosmetic seconds at bargain prices.

Boop is aiming to do what the 'wonky' fruit and veg ethos has done for food waste by repurposing some of the 90m beauty products thrown away each year in the UK alone. That's the weight of 650 double decker buses and equates to 4,500 tons of moisturizer; 1,000 tons of mascara, and four Olympic sized swimming pools of perfume. A tenth of that waste occurs in brands' supply chains and 6.2% of discarded beauty goods are down to over-production.

"A huge number of beauty products are destroyed each year by manufacturers and retailers without ever hitting the market", confirmed Boop founder, Yasmine Amr.

"Consumers and brands are becoming far more conscious of sustainability - and consumers don't really care if their product doesn't look perfect or has older packaging."

Amr's background in law led to her working as legal counsel for L'Oreal. Being on the inside of the beauty industry means she has witnessed first-hand how red tape and business processes contribute to wide-scale waste.

"Throughout my career, I would have people come to me asking what to do about products that had printing errors, slow-moving items which they didn't want to store, or obsolete items. These were products that were perfectly fine to use", said Amr.

France has already banned the destruction of unsold cosmetics and similar legislation is under consultation for the EU and UK. Meanwhile Boop's research indicates that 95% of people would happily buy stock deemed surplus or imperfect due to a labelling mishap, damage or changes to branding.

Its online range features mid to high-end brands with discounts of up to 70% on products that would otherwise be destined for landfill.

**A Poem:** read by Delphine:

'HOIST THE SAILS!' By John McConnell, a Founder of Earth Day  
(slightly adapted)

Four billion years ago  
Our lonely Earth  
Set sail on cosmic seas  
Guided by an unseen hand  
Of nature, God or chance.

As life evolved  
Through endless eco-cycles  
Humans were born, destined  
To destroy or enrich  
the Precious Ship.

And now their hands  
Have seized the tiller  
But their ears have not  
Yet caught the Captain's  
Quiet command.

The sails are down, the ship becalmed,  
Its fragile life at stake.  
No longer do we ride the gentle swells of  
Silent seas and breathe  
The fragrant air.

Broken are the rhythms  
Of our cyclic plants  
And other living things.

But now the Captain speaks again  
Our quiet thoughts at last reveal his voice.

"Hoist the sails, Earth Folk.  
Set them for celestial winds.  
Hold the tiller firm,  
The course ahead is clear."

Be He Nature, God or Chance  
His voice is heard  
And we shall heed  
The Captain's quiet command

**2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn:** P 199 'Weaver God, Creator'

Weaver God, Creator, sets life on the loom,  
draws out threads of colour from primordial gloom.  
Wise in the designing, in the weaving deft;  
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Called to be co-weavers, yet we break the thread  
and may smash the shuttle and the loom, instead.  
Careless and greedy, we deny by theft,  
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weaver God, great Spirit, may we see your face  
tapestried in trees, in waves and winds of space;  
tenderness teach us, lest we be bereft  
of love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weavers we are called, yet woven too we're born,  
for the web is seamless, if we tear, we're torn.  
Gently may we live – that fragile earth be left;  
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

**Meditation** words by Maryell Cleary 'Our Best expectations'

Knowing that we do not always live up to our best expectation of ourselves, let us in quietness seek the good within, which some call 'the Inner Light' and some 'A spark of the Divine' ....

Knowing that we live in a society that falls far short of the ideal, let us in quietness resolve to do one thing this week to aid those suffering from want and injustice .....

Knowing that the Earth is our home and that humankind is making it a dirty and even poisonous home, let us in quietness consider how we might be part of making it more healthful for all living things ....

Knowing that each of us has some sorrow or worry hidden within, let us consider in quietness how we may reach out to one another with our smiles, our handclasps, and our encouraging words ....

**A short silence**

**Reflective Music: 'Earth Song' by Frank Ticheli sung by VOCES8**

<https://youtu.be/4p8PYuzx5iM>

**ADDRESS – "Earth Day"**

Today over 65,000 people from 158 nations are running in the London Marathon. Next week, Plymothians will run in the Plymouth Half Marathon, and some shorter runs, now known as 'Britain's Ocean City Running Festival'. Both events are gruelling tests of athleticism, stamina, and most importantly, determination and perseverance when the going gets tough. Sometimes, being able to take disappointment if they can't finish the course. Rather than me!

Tomorrow, sandwiched in between the bigger event in London and our home city run next weekend, is Earth Day, a global event involving an estimated billion people from nearly 200 nations.

You may wonder what connection running a Marathon has with taking part in an Earth Day event? The majority of the Marathon runners are not top class athletes, but will have trained hard to develop stamina. They need to have determination and strength of character /perseverance (aka stubbornness). Most people taking part in Earth Day probably aren't top class athletes either, but environmentalists, with a keen interest in the health of our home planet and a determination to do their bit to improve it. Perseverance, 'strength of character', stubbornness call it what you will, is an essential quality! Charles Secrett, a former Director of Friends of the Earth, once said to me that so is patience.

The first Earth Day took place in USA in spring of 1970, 11 years before the first London Marathon (in 1981). It went global in 1990, and has taken place every year since apart from during the pandemic. Each year it has a theme: this year's is 'Planet versus Plastic'

How did Earth Day come about?

In the 1950's and 60's in the USA, the population and the economy boomed, following World War II. For the first time, many Americans could afford items of which their parents could only have dreamed. They could afford to buy their homes, or rent better quality ones, filling them with what soon became regarded as essentials: central heating, fridges, electrical goods, furnishings, fashionable clothes. For many, owning a car was also essential. These were huge and inefficient, consuming vast amounts of leaded petrol ('gas'), giving out toxic emissions, which together with the smoke and sludge from the factories, polluted the air, land and rivers. Most Americans were oblivious to environmental concerns, unaware of how a polluted environment threatens human health, and that of other living creatures.

Did people believe the Biblical instruction, in Genesis 1:28 *"And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

Talk about lost in translation!

It couldn't go on forever - Rachel Carson's book 'Silent Spring' was published in 1962. Her book raised public awareness and concern for living organisms, the environment and the links between pollution and public health. It became a best seller. Over half a million copies were sold in over 20 countries. It was a watershed moment. I can remember there was a copy in our school library, and still wonder which inspired member of staff requested it?

Journalist and peace activist John McConnell was also passionate about our planet's well-being. Since early 1960s he had a vision of a day to bring people together to celebrate the Earth and promote responsible stewardship, rather than 'dominion', which led to such damage over the centuries. He introduced the idea of a global holiday called "Earth Day" at the 1969 UNESCO Conference on the Environment, suggested holding it at the Spring equinox, on March 20/21<sup>st</sup>.

In January and February 1969, a huge oil spill from a rig near Santa Barbara, the largest at the time, killed many dolphins, seals, and sea lions and thousands of sea birds. The public was outraged. Even President Nixon visited the area. Senator Gaylord Nelson, already concerned about the state of the environment, wanted to channel the energy of the anti-Vietnam War protestors into addressing environmental concerns. Senator Nelson shared McConnell's vision of a special day, seeing it as an "environmental teach-in". He preferred late April because it avoided college exams, the religious holidays of Easter and Passover, and was more likely to have better weather.

It was also around the anniversary of the birth of noted conservationist John Muir.

And so the first Earth Day was held on Wednesday April 22, 1970.

20 million Americans, 1 in 10 of population, inspired by McConnell and led by Senator Nelson, came together for rallies, clean-up efforts, and various environmental activities. This impressive response to this first 'Earth Day' showed that people feel a strong emotional and spiritual connection with our environment, going beyond merely its physical aspect. I feel sure these feelings were also inspired by the experience shared by the Apollo 8 astronauts.

On Christmas Eve, 1968, Apollo 8 astronauts Frank Borman, Jim Lovell, and Bill Anders became the first humans to witness the Earth rising above the moon's barren surface. The photos they hurriedly took are now famous as the 'Earthrise' photos. Who cannot be but deeply moved by this vision of our home planet, this beautiful, vulnerable, fragile blue and white globe, hanging isolated against the background of the nothingness of dark space.

Americans were inspired to celebrate Earth Day every year since. This led to the setting up of their Environment agency and the passing of several laws to protect various aspects of the Environment.

In 1990, Earth Day became a global event. Each year, there is a theme, reflecting a major concern, to inspire people around the world to take actions to prevent further damage, much caused by humans in the first place.

This year it is 'Plastic versus Planet'. We have all seen for ourselves, and in images on TV and other media, of the enormous amounts of discarded plastic littering our towns and cities, our country-side, rivers and seas. Tons of the stuff, a lot of it single use, like the bottles in our video story earlier. Its far more than unsightly; discarded plastic is destroying habitats, posing risks to our wildlife, and by contaminating the food chain, ultimately, to our selves.

An historic UN treaty on plastics, is being drawn up, for reducing plastic waste around the world. Nearly 200 countries have agreed to start negotiations on an international agreement to take action on the "plastic crisis", and it is hoped this will be agreed by the end of 2024. Supporters describe it as one of the world's most ambitious environmental actions since the 1989 Montreal Protocol, which phased out ozone-depleting substances. The organisers of Earth Day are calling for a 60% reduction in the production of all plastics by 2040.

So, what can we do to help? We heard in Marianne's reading, that dealing with even very specific items can have a significant effect. As a church we signed a 'plastic free pledge' some years ago to limit our use of plastics, especially single use ones. It is encouraging that plastic items like straws and cutlery are no longer sold.

What can you and I do? Some simple ideas

1. Shop Sustainably: Next time you are out shopping, choose food with no plastic packaging, carry a reusable bag, buy local products, and refill containers to reduce your plastic waste and effect on the environment.
2. Try a Zero-Waste Lifestyle: Become a zero-waste champion. Invest in sustainable, ocean-friendly products- reusable coffee mugs, water bottles and food wraps. Consider options like menstrual cups, bamboo toothbrushes and shampoo bars. These will help you save money and the ocean too
3. Travel Sustainably: When you are on holiday, try to watch your single-use plastic intake. Refuse miniature bottles in hotel rooms, take your own reusable drinking bottle and use reef-safe sunscreen, without microplastics.

4. Be an advocate for change: Ask your local supermarkets, restaurants and local suppliers to ditch plastic packaging, refuse plastic cutlery and straws, and tell them why. Pressure your local authorities to improve how they manage waste – go on, when the local candidate knocks on your door, to canvass your vote on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, ask what they are going to do about it!

5. Dress Sustainably: The fashion industry produces 20 per cent of global wastewater and 10 per cent of global carbon emissions. That's more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. "Fast fashion" is so last year. Consider sustainable clothing lines, vintage shops and repair your clothes when possible.

6. Choose plastic-free personal care products: Personal care products are a major source of microplastics, which get washed into the oceans straight from our bathrooms. Look for plastic-free face wash, day cream, makeup, deodorant, shampoo and other products. That seems like a great long list, don't be discouraged, do what you can !

When it comes to environmental matters, none of us can 'do it all'... we all have our strengths and weaknesses, the things we find hard to change, but we can all do *something*. None of us are perfect. As Winston Churchill said, 'perfection is the enemy of progress' but we *can* still make progress; maybe by changing just one thing at a time .... over time, they all add up. Even one less piece of plastic let loose means one less piece finding its way down the drain into the river and sea, potentially saving at least one life. If we all do that, many lives will be saved.

In closing, let us remember, its about not having dominion over our fellow creatures, but about being good stewards, to protect and hopefully improve on what we pass on to future generations. I feel the following quote is a good one to leave with you:

In the preface to her book, 'Cherishing The Earth – Nourishing The Spirit' the editor Unitarian Minister Rev Dr Maria Curtis writes, "We are apparently  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the window of habitability on the Earth. In about 1.5 billion years .... Life on Earth will no longer be possible.... But meanwhile we still have more living to do. Why end it all prematurely? Let us continue to occupy our place in space and time, not as plunderers and exploiters, but with gratitude and humility, aware of our interconnectedness and interdependency with the Earth, her land, her rivers and oceans, her air and her creatures. Let us preserve the natural world as the primary revelation of the divine. It is our duty as conscious beings to use our gifts wisely and responsibly. Let us be worthy of the 13.8 billion years that brought us into being.

Its not a sprint, it's a marathon!

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Hymn:

Purple Book 216 'Wide Green world we know and love you'

Wide green world, we know and love you:  
 clear blue skies that arch above you,  
 moon-tugged oceans rising, falling,  
 summer rain and cuckoo calling.  
 some wild ancient ferment bore us,  
 us and all that went before us:  
 life in desert, forest, mountain,  
 life in stream and springing fountain.

We know how to mould and tame you,



we have power to mar and maim you.  
Show us by your silent growing  
that which we should all be knowing:  
we are of you, not your master,  
we who plan supreme disaster.  
If with careless greed we use you  
inch by extinct inch we lose you.

May our births and deaths remind us  
others still will come behind us.  
That they also may enjoy you  
we with wisdom will employ you.  
That our care may always bless you  
teach us we do not possess you.  
We are part and parcel of you.  
Wide green world, we share and love you.

**Closing Words:** So, to close, I leave you with this thought, from the Unitarian book 'Fragments of Holiness', which has quotations from many well known thinkers, poets, writers, and activists, one for each day of the year.

The quotation for April 22, Earth Day, is by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who urges us, "Love all of God's creation, both the whole and every grain of sand, in it. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, love every kind of thing. If you love each fragment, then everywhere God's mystery will reveal itself to you. Once you perceive it, you will begin to understand it ever more deeply with each passing day. And finally you will be able to love the whole world with an all-embracing, universal love."

- And from that love, we can each find the strength and will to do what we can...

... its not a sprint, it's a marathon!      *AMEN*

### **Extinguish Chalice**

**Closing Music/ video: 'Love Song to the Earth' an official Earth Day video**

[https://youtu.be/ZSnOXbaXzfM?si=7jrl\\_P\\_OTiqKIZdP](https://youtu.be/ZSnOXbaXzfM?si=7jrl_P_OTiqKIZdP)