***Thanks to Christian McIvor, Minister of Music & Worship at College Park Baptist Church in Greensboro, NC for sharing this resource with the Creation Justice community for Earth Day Sunday 2020. Direct questions to: christianmcivor@gmail.com***

**EARTH DAY BAPTISMAL REMEMBRANCE RITUAL**

**SETTING**

The setting for the particular ritual scripted below is the lawn of College Park Baptist Church in Greensboro, NC, and it is intended to be celebrated on Earth Day Sunday. However, the language and elements of the ritual can easily be adjusted to make it appropriate for particular congregations and locations. Earth Day falls on April 22, and congregations can choose to celebrate on the Sunday immediately before or following that date, whichever is more convenient for them. The ritual is intended to take place immediately following the Sunday morning service(s).

**PREPARATION**

As creation care is a primary focus of this ritual, paper copies of the liturgy should be kept to a minimum (it might be beneficial to provide several copies in large print for those who might need them). The liturgy should be posted on the church website and it is suggested that congregants be notified of this via spoken and written announcements the week of as well as 1-2 weeks prior. Congregants should also be notified ahead of time that part of the ritual involves taking off their shoes (and socks), although this can be optional in case that makes anyone particularly uncomfortable. Chairs/benches should be prepared outside ahead of time for those who are unable to stand for 5-10 minutes. It is suggested that 3 different liturgists are involved, both to provide different voices and also for the sake of time when enacting the physical part of the ritual. Ideally, a vessel fashioned from local clay/materials should be used to hold water collected from the water source nearest to the church. A musician will need to be prepared to lead “Baptized in Water” at the close of the ritual.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this ritual is to offer individuals and congregations a yearly opportunity to remember how our baptism by water connects us deeply with all of creation, calling us to be active stewards of the earth and engaged disciples of our own watersheds.

**RITUAL – SCRIPT**

**Leader:**

As Christians, baptism is a sign of our essential identity as God’s people and our commitment to a life lived in the love of Christ as stewards of creation. We are baptized into the River of God, which flows from one end of Scripture to the other - from the Garden of Eden in Genesis to the vision of a new creation in Revelation. Let us remember that our baptism by water connects us deeply with all of creation, immersing us in the story of God.

If you’re comfortable doing so, I’d like to invite you to remove your shoes and root your bare feet into the ground…

And now let’s close our eyes, take a comfortable stance, and breathe slowly and deeply… Feel the living earth underneath us. Notice the breath of God in the wind as it dances through us…

**[moment of silence]**

And now let us read together from the liturgy…

**Liturgist 1:** A reading from the Book of Genesis (1:1-2)… “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

**Leader:** As the waters were used by God to bring life to the void Earth, the same waters nurture, cultivate, and satisfy our bodies, our minds, and our souls.

**All: As we immerse ourselves in the birthing waters, we remind ourselves that though we are formed from the dust of the earth, we are filled and refreshed by the waters of this earth; the waters which revive us again and again.**

**Liturgist 2:** A reading from the Book of Genesis (1:20, 2:5-10 excerpt)… “And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.” No plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up… but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east…”

**Leader:** Our creation story teaches us that the hydrological cycle is not something outside of us. We were created and are sustained as part of the hydrological cycle. As the Creator used their hands to form and shape the Earth, we see that God’s creation isn’t always fixed.

**All: As the Master Artisan, God has created beauty in flow and in cycle. As the water falls from the sky and touches our skin, we are touched by divine grace; as the water flows throughout the Earth, we are reminded of God’s promise. We are nourished by these gifts – these divine gifts – and find solace in renewal. We accept the renewal of living water – today, tomorrow, forever – as a reminder of God’s continual blessings every day.**

**Liturgist 3:** A reading from the Book of Mark (1:9-11)… “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**Leader:** Jesus starts his healing ministry by being united with the Holy Spirit only after a deep submersion *into* his beloved homeland, grounding him in the storied Jordan watershed of his ancestors, through which the God of Israel was still speaking. Do we know the stories of our own watershed - the stories of both faithfulness and violation held by land and waters of our home?

**All: What would it mean for us to move from an experience of the sacred water of our baptism to the sacredness of all water? What would it mean for us to be re-baptized into our watershed as an immersion into the reality of our local waters? Could we be “born again” into a covenant not just with God and community, but with our own individual watersheds, and thereby all of creation?**

**Leader:** And now, we remember how our baptism calls us into an interdependent relationship with all of creation, which starts in our own watershed. This vessel is made from North Carolina clay, fashioned with water from our Reedy Fork watershed by artisans at Moonbird Soulful Living less than a mile from here. The water it holds was collected from our North Buffalo Creek subwatershed, which is part of the Reedy Fork watershed, which is part of the Haw River subbasin, which is part of the Cape Fear River Basin. We invite you to receive a blessing of the waters of our home upon your forehead. If you would prefer not to be touched, please hold your arms in an “x” shape in front of you and we will be happy to simply speak a blessing over you. Remember that in our baptism, we receive the promise of Christ’s living water. And with the Spirit, we are led to work toward the promise of a new and transformed creation.

**Leader and Liturgists:** “Remember your baptism into your watershed and into all of creation” **[This is to be said to each person individually while making a cross on their forehead with water from the clay vessel]**.

**Leader:** Now, let’s sing as we go forth, renewed in the remembrance of our baptism, and revived by the Spirit to be active stewards of creation!

**All Sing – *Baptized in Water*:**

Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,

Cleansed by the love of Christ’s offering;

Heirs of salvation, trusting the promise,

Faithfully now God's praises we sing.

Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,

Brought to new life in Christ’s offering;

One with his rising, freed and forgiven,

Thankfully now God's praises we sing.

Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,

Marked with the sign of Christ’s offering;

Born of the Spirit, we are God's children;

Joyfully now God's praises we sing.

**Leader:** Go in peace.