

Forest Sunday

When read together on Forest Sunday, these texts speak through the trees, saying, “find God through the earth.” Each text, in its own way, asks that we find God’s majesty, mystery, and voice, in the places of mystery on Earth, especially in the areas where trees live and house creatures.

Focus scripture: Acts 17:22–28

Paul calls for the people of Athens to see the one God – in whom we live and move and have our being – in the “unknown God” that they venerate in a city shrine. Perhaps, to learn from the people Paul taught, we too should look for God in unexpected places – in forests. Trees, as is the nature of God, are wise and grounded – they hold mysterious knowledge, unknown to us. Trees communicate through their root systems. They house living things. In medieval times, remembering that Jesus was crucified on a tree, some nuns would run out and hug trees and call them Jesus, making them the first (and largely forgotten) tree-huggers. Like the people of Athens, we search for God. We would do well to search in a forest, where we see a beloved community of squirrels and ferns, giant trunks and branches, mosses and shrubs. In God’s gardens, we learn of our origins and our teachers, we learn of our ancestors and our future. We share the air with the plants, breathing in the oxygen they exhale, thanking them for the carbon they trap on our heating planet. They are the angels and saints among us, housing God and caring for the place where we learn of our spirit through the earth.

Genesis 2:4b–22, read on Forest Sunday, reminds us that creation began in a forest, of sorts – a garden. Trees grew throughout and shaded other trees. Two of those trees were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If we think about a garden as a space cultivated by human hands, then is it accurate to call Eden a garden? Perhaps all of creation, then, including this forest, is God’s

garden. This forest is special, not only as God’s first garden; it is also the first classroom where humans learn – where they learn of beauty, of greed, of thirst for knowledge, and limits. God hid lessons in these trees and shrubs. We would do well to keep looking for lessons in the forest.

Thinking of trees and forests as holding the lessons of God, we turn to **Psalm 139:13–16**. “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made...I was woven in the depths of the earth,” says the psalm’s speaker. Can we imagine that this is a tree speaking to us, not a human? God wove an earthly garden filled with trees that became cities of creation.

Like the plants of the forest, we too are born from the earth. When we forget this, we, like Nicodemus, miss the message of Jesus and new life. In **John 3:1–16**, Nicodemus asks Jesus for a divine answer, and Jesus gives him an earthly one. Jesus tells Nicodemus that we might be people of spirit, but we find our spirit through the earth, planting ourselves in a web of connection like a grove of aspen trees.

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So often, we read the Bible through the lens of our human experience. What if, on Forest Sunday, we read it through the lens of the forest? What does the forest teach about God? The Bible’s many writers lived in different times, and they praised forests throughout. Maybe it’s no coincidence that our first Bible story starts in a forest. Perhaps it’s where we first went to be taught, and where we still can learn.

Season of Creation
(Year A)

Focus scripture

Acts 17:22–28

Additional scriptures

Genesis 2:4b–22

Psalm 139:13–16

John 3:1–16



Resources based on
semi-continuous

readings of the *Revised Common*

Lectionary can be found online at

www.seasonsonline.ca/RCLresources.

**God, the forests
teach us that you
have spoken, from
the dawn of time,
through many
voices. We hear you
in the wind, ferns,
moss, and forest
canopies, speaking
to us from Eden.
Your wisdom and
presence grow
roots of love across
Earth. We listen.
Amen.**

Lection 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

Children in this age group are interested in the environment. They learn about it in school and from an early age they see programs about nature on television. Their studies and experiences usually teach them to care for the environment so that it will be sustained.

As they celebrate the Season of Creation during this month, children will discover that the environment has much to teach us as well. From the forests, they can learn about the web of connection that binds all creation together

with the Creator God. For many children their deepest experiences of God and the sacred are in creation and happen during times when they can explore nature. You are encouraged to take the children outdoors for at least a part of the session.

Pray that the children in your group will discover the connections they have to all of creation, rejoicing in the wonder of God's creation and being affirmed as having a special place in God's creation.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Acts 17:22–28, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 3).
- Review "[About this Season of Creation, Pentecost 2](#)" (p. 1) and "[This Season of Creation and Pentecost 2 for Ages 5–12](#)" (p. 2).
- Set a worship space with aqua cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark in focus passage, and basket of items from a forest (such as seed pods, cones, feathers, leaves, bark).
- 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 *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Engage

- Bring resource sheet "[Creator of the Universe](#)" and, if possible, the song "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #21 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

- Game group:** ball of yarn and resource sheet "[Season of Creation Games](#)" (p. 100)
- Research group:** copies of resource sheet "[Paul and the Athenians](#)"
- Bring large circle of green 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:** pictures of different types of forests (from nature magazines or calendars)
- Nature zone:** branches or sturdy sticks, string or yarn
- Writing zone:** card stock/ heavy paper, yarn
- Outreach zone:** no additional materials needed
- Craft zone:** plastic lids, small nails, permanent markers, yarn

Bless

- Bring, if possible, song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- Bring copies of resource sheet "[Forest Links](#)" and copies of "[Letter to Families](#)" (p. 99).



Forest Sunday

Scripture

Acts 17:22–28

FOCUS To celebrate God's presence in forests and in all of creation

Gather

Welcome the children and explain that today we begin a new season in the church year called 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 explain that today is Forest Sunday, a day to think about the forests in the world and to wonder what they might have to say to us. Invite children to choose a "forest friend" from the basket of items in the worship space. Point out the aqua cloth. Explain that this colour reminds us of the green-blue colour of the planet Earth.

Lead the group in the following litany:

Leader: Come, let us celebrate God!

(Invite a child to light the candle.)

God created the forests of the world.

(Invite children to place the forest items 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 *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 forests 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

Invite the children to share their thoughts about forests. Ask:

- **What do you think of, or imagine, when you hear the word "forest"?**
- **What does a forest look, smell, sound, and feel like?**
- **What would you like to do in a forest?**

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to Acts. Point out that we usually call this book "Acts," but the full title is "The Acts of the Apostles." Mention that when the church was just beginning, followers of Jesus (called apostles) travelled to many countries to share God's love and stories about Jesus. One of these apostles was called Paul. He had many exciting adventures in his travels, such as shipwrecks, snake bites, and earthquakes. Some of these adventures were written down and eventually became the book of Acts in the Bible.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Creator of the Universe](#)" to present the story based on **Acts 17:22–28**, to tell the story inviting children to participate as indicated.

Wondering questions Use some or all of the following questions to wonder together:

- **What was Paul's message to the people of Athens?**
- **What do you think Paul wanted them to know about God?**

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 explore the connections among all of creation through a game. Follow the directions on the resource sheet "[Season of Creation Games](#)" (p. 100) to do the "Web of connection" activity together.

Research group *(for older children)* This group will learn more about the religious situation in Athens and Paul's response. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Paul and the Athenians](#)" and invite children to work together in pairs to answer the questions. Review together the section "Religion in Ancient Greece." If any in the group have been learning about these Greek gods at school invite them to share additional information.

Reporting Invite the game group to name some of the ways that we are connected through nature and invite the research group to share what they have discovered about Paul.

The Bible story and us

Forest collage Invite children to create a "Forest collage" by tearing out bark-coloured pieces of paper from magazines to glue onto the green poster board circle to form trunks and branches of trees. Other colours can provide ground cover under the trees and sky above. Cut or tear out coloured leaf shapes to add to the branches. (Note: there is no need to make an actual picture, just make a blend of colours to suggest a forest.)

As they work, encourage the group to talk together about how the creatures and plants of a forest are connected. For example, trees provide food, shelter, and oxygen; animals help disperse seeds and provide carbon dioxide.

On this Sunday we listen to the voice of the Forest.

- **What might the forests 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: Storytelling** Invite children to think more deeply about one part of God's creation, the forests. Distribute pictures of various types of forests and invite group members to form pairs. Have each pair spend some time examining their pictures and thinking about the plants and creatures that might live there. Then have them make up a story about "their forest." Gather as a whole group and share the stories together. What might each forest be asking us to do to keep it healthy and care for it?



- **Nature zone: Mobile** *(for younger children)* In God the whole of creation lives and moves and has its being. Invite children to choose a branch or stick and demonstrate how to tie objects (from the collection used in the Gathering activity) to the branches using string or yarn. Use differing lengths to add interest. Add a string or yarn



loop for hanging. Encourage children to hang their mobiles at home in a place where they will catch the breeze and move gently as a reminder of God's presence.

- **Writing zone: Forest poems** God's awesome power is shown in the forest and in all of creation. Distribute card stock and invite children to cut these into the shape of trees, and write within the shape a thank-you poem to the trees in the forest for all the gifts they give to the Earth (such as shade, beauty, safety, oxygen, paper, furniture). Alternatively, they could write a poem expressing a commitment to care for creation by caring for trees. If possible, use yarn or string to hang these poems in trees around the church building or in the trees of a nearby park. Or make a display for the church hall.



❑ **Outreach zone: Paper product survey** Part of caring for the forests in creation is reducing the amount of paper used in daily life. Make a list of the paper products used regularly by the children in their homes and discuss how many of each product would be used each week. (Option: Encourage children to keep a chart for a month noting what is used weekly.) Talk together about how the use of each of these items could be reduced and which items they think they could do without. Have them each write a “proposal” for their families, naming ways they could use less paper and thus save more trees.



❑ **Craft zone: Nature spirals** (for older children) God breathes life into interconnected communities. Invite children to make hanging spirals as reminders that the whole of creation has its being in God. Help children to use the nails to poke a hole in the middle of a plastic lid and use a permanent marker to draw a spiral that starts a little way from the hole and extends out to the rim. Cut along line and thread a piece of yarn through the hole in the middle, securing with a knot. Have them punch another hole at the end of their spirals and use yarn to attach one of the small forest objects from the basket in the worship space. Encourage children to hang their spirals where they will catch the breeze and spin gently.

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 forests.
May we remember that we are part
of a giant web of creation. Amen.

Blessing Offer the following blessing: “Always remember that God’s love is very close.”

Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Forest Links](#)” and the “[Letter to Families](#)” (p. 99).

Reflect

What connections did the children discover between themselves, others, and the community of Earth? In what ways were the children able to bring the voice of the forest into your discussion?



CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE

including Acts 17:22–28

Practice telling the story with the song on the *Seasons Music CD* or in the *Songbook*. Notice that it is prompted twice.

Paul was a teacher who travelled far and wide to tell people about God and God's love. He was also eager to tell the story of Jesus to anyone who would listen.

One day, Paul travelled alone to the city of Athens. The road to Athens wound through beautiful countryside. Paul saw huge groves of olive trees and fields of wildflowers with insects buzzing over them. Brightly coloured butterflies fluttered from flower to flower. Overhead, birds swooped in large circles, singing to one another.

When Paul arrived in Athens, he walked around in the middle of the city to see what Athens and the Athenians were like. He noticed many places where people could go to worship. Statues were all over with the names of different gods on them. "What a religious people these Athenians are," Paul thought.

Then he came to a statue with the title "To the god with no name." "I know who that god is," Paul said to himself. Paul began speaking about the God he knew and about Jesus the Christ. When the people heard him, they wondered what kind of new teaching this was. Always curious about new things, they invited Paul to speak to them. And Paul did.

"I see that you are very religious. I want to tell you about 'the god with no name.' This is the God of

the universe, the God who made the world and everything in it. This God is much too big and powerful to be contained in a statue like your other gods. When we look at the world around us, we see God's awesome power. When we look inside ourselves, we can see God's love, a love that is deep inside us and all around us. In this God, we live and move and have our being."

Paul's words flew into the air as he spoke. They twirled on the breezes that circle our beautiful Earth until they reached the trees of the forests. The breezes spoke Paul's message in ways that the creatures and plants of the forests could understand.

"God has made all of creation," said the wise old trees. "From the oldest trees to the tiniest of creatures in the forests, God has made us all. When we look at toadstools or the most delicate butterfly, we see God's work. All of us tell about God who made everything." Then the trees began to sing a song of God.

Sing, or listen to the recording "In God We Live and Move" (p. 24 in volume 9 of the Seasons Songbook and #21 on the Seasons Music CD, vol. 9.)

Everything in the forest took up this song. "God is all around and deep inside," they thought as they sang. The trees waved their branches and sang the words. The animals in the forest joined in the song. The birds flew as they sang the song. The forest was alive with the music.

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

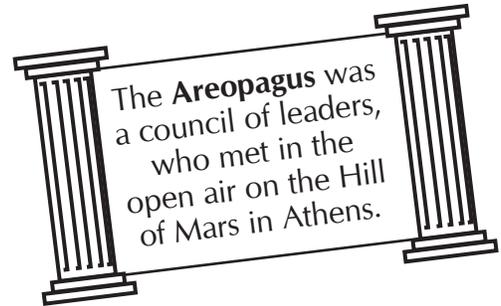
The song, with each plant and creature singing in its own way, grew and grew as the forest praised God. For it was God who made them and all the universe.



PAUL AND THE ATHENIANS

The Bible passage today is part of a larger story. To understand what was happening (and why) we need to do some detective work. Good detectives always do background research. First, let's go to the book of Acts and see what clues it offers.

Paul was waiting for his co-workers Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens. What did Paul do while he was waiting? See Acts 17:17.



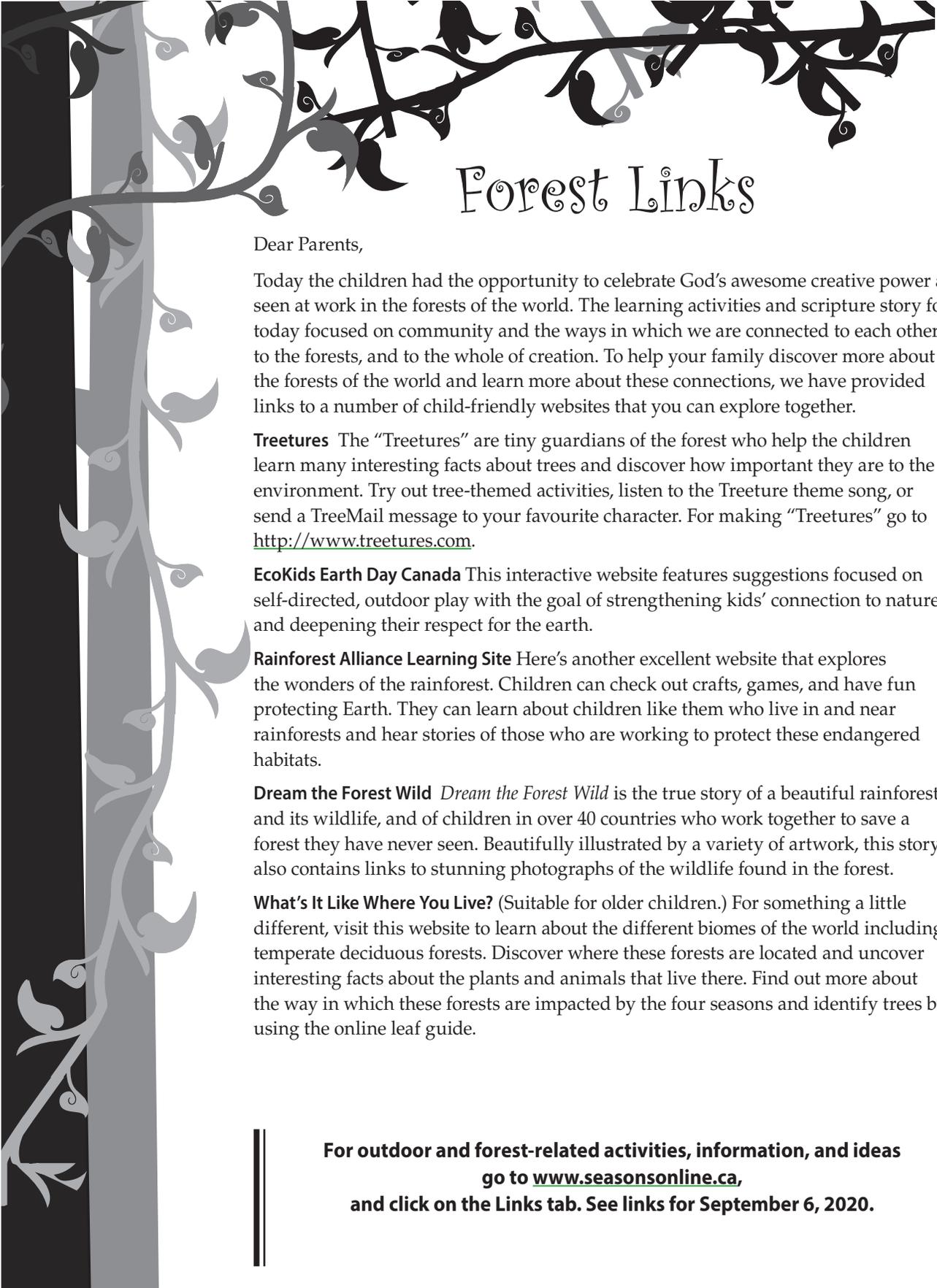
Who else wanted to talk with Paul? See Acts 17:18.

Where did they bring Paul, and why? See Acts 17:19–20.

Why were they interested in what Paul had to say? See Acts 17:21.

Religion in Ancient Greece

- The religion in Ancient Greece was polytheistic, which means they worshipped many gods and goddesses.
- These gods and goddesses included Zeus, the god of thunder; Poseidon, god of the sea and earthquakes; Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty; Ares, the god of war and bloodlust; and Dionysus the god of wine and madness.
- The ancient Greeks worshipped these gods at altars throughout the city. Usually each altar was devoted to one particular god. As there were many gods, there were many altars.
- It was also customary to build an altar “to an unknown god” to avoid offending any god not known to them.



Forest Links

Dear Parents,

Today the children had the opportunity to celebrate God's awesome creative power as seen at work in the forests of the world. The learning activities and scripture story for today focused on community and the ways in which we are connected to each other, to the forests, and to the whole of creation. To help your family discover more about the forests of the world and learn more about these connections, we have provided links to a number of child-friendly websites that you can explore together.

Treetures The "Treetures" are tiny guardians of the forest who help the children learn many interesting facts about trees and discover how important they are to the environment. Try out tree-themed activities, listen to the Treeture theme song, or send a TreeMail message to your favourite character. For making "Treetures" go to <http://www.treetures.com>.

EcoKids Earth Day Canada This interactive website features suggestions focused on self-directed, outdoor play with the goal of strengthening kids' connection to nature and deepening their respect for the earth.

Rainforest Alliance Learning Site Here's another excellent website that explores the wonders of the rainforest. Children can check out crafts, games, and have fun protecting Earth. They can learn about children like them who live in and near rainforests and hear stories of those who are working to protect these endangered habitats.

Dream the Forest Wild *Dream the Forest Wild* is the true story of a beautiful rainforest and its wildlife, and of children in over 40 countries who work together to save a forest they have never seen. Beautifully illustrated by a variety of artwork, this story also contains links to stunning photographs of the wildlife found in the forest.

What's It Like Where You Live? (Suitable for older children.) For something a little different, visit this website to learn about the different biomes of the world including temperate deciduous forests. Discover where these forests are located and uncover interesting facts about the plants and animals that live there. Find out more about the way in which these forests are impacted by the four seasons and identify trees by using the online leaf guide.

**For outdoor and forest-related activities, information, and ideas
go to www.seasonsonline.ca,
and click on the Links tab. See links for September 6, 2020.**

Letter to Families

Welcome to this season of the church year, which began on June 7, the week after Pentecost Sunday, and which ends on November 22, the Sunday before Advent.

During September we celebrate the *Season of Creation*. During these four weeks, children will be exploring the awesome creative power of God who “gives life and breath to all.” Each week they will focus on one aspect of creation, listening to what the Forests, Land, Wilderness/Outback, and Rivers can teach us about God and God’s ways. Consider setting up a nature table at home for these four weeks, adding items from the natural world or photos or pictures cut from nature calendars and magazines to represent forests, land, wilderness/outback, and rivers.

We encourage you to spend some time with your children, if possible, walking through a forest, exploring the different kinds of landscapes in your area, visiting a wilderness/outback area, and spending some time beside a river. What environmental projects could your family do together during these weeks to honour and explore one of these four aspects of creation?

In October and November we move into the last half of the *Season after Pentecost*. During October, children will hear some of the foundational stories of our faith from Exodus 20, 32, and 33, and Deuteronomy 34 about Moses and his leadership of the Hebrew people. In November, the children will hear three well-known parables from Jesus’ teachings, recorded in Matthew 25, about living in God’s way.

We invite you to read these stories from a children’s Bible at home. Invite your child to re-tell the stories as they were explored at church. Storytelling is important and through these stories children can begin to see how God works in their lives and in the lives of others. If possible, set aside time for storytelling as a family; telling your own stories and those from your family history, seeing how the Spirit moves in the telling.

One of the scripture readings for this season is the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments (found in Exodus 20). The following paraphrase of some of those commandments offers guidelines for loving God and one another. Consider posting it in your home during this season:

- Remember God is love and say God’s name with love.
- Take time to rest and to pray with God.
- Parents and children, love and care for one another.
- Respect all living things.
- Keep your promises to one another.
- Respect what belongs to another.
- Tell the truth about others.
- Be content with the good things of your own life.

We will be praying for your child during these weeks. We ask that you and your child pray for us as well as we prepare for and lead the sessions each week. May these months be ones of growth and discovery for your child and your family.

Blessings,

Suggested resources: *The Family Story Bible and Family Story Bible Colouring Book*, illustrated by Margaret Kyle, or *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year A*. For older children, *Read, Wonder, Listen: Stories from the Bible for Young Readers*. Both are available from the publisher of *Seasons of the Spirit* at www.woodlakebooks.com.

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.