



**Theme: Growing in God!**  
**Blessing of Garden tools, seeds and gardeners**

*The worship items included in this service have been compiled over many years from various sources (unfortunately not cited), so if you recognise anything as yours, please let Worship Words know so that credit can be given where it is due. Thanks, Ana & Tod Gobledale*

**Preparation:**

- Bowls of sunflower seeds (enough for every person to take one)
- A bag for the sharing time / children's message containing: sunflower seeds, photos of sunflowers
- Decorate with trowels, gloves, watering cans, gardening hats, rakes, etc.

**Song possibilities**

*[In each and every process](https://sites.google.com/site/singwithgeorgevoll/home/volume-4/the-cosmos-and-nature/in-each-and-every-process) by George Stuart, Australia  
<https://sites.google.com/site/singwithgeorgevoll/home/volume-4/the-cosmos-and-nature/in-each-and-every-process>*

*Inch by inch, row by row*

*[https://www.lyricsmania.com/garden\\_song\\_lyrics\\_pete\\_seeger.html](https://www.lyricsmania.com/garden_song_lyrics_pete_seeger.html)*

*Think of a world without any flowers*

*O let us spread the pollen of peace*

*Let all creation dance*

*For the beauty of the earth*

**Bible Reading options**

*John 15:1-8 (the vine)*

*Mark 4: 2-8, 10, 13-20 (Parable of the Sower)*

*Joel 2:21-24*

*Genesis 1 (selected verses)*

*Genesis 1 (selected verses) -- for 1-4 readers*

**Reader 1:** Our reading this morning includes selected verses from the first creation story recorded in Genesis chapter 1. It is written: 'Then God said,'

**Reader 2:** 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

**Reader 1:** So, God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God they were created, male and female God created them. God blessed them, and God said to them,

**Reader 2:** 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

**Reader 1:** God said,

**Reader 2:** 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.'

**Reader 1:** And it was so. God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.... The Eternal One took Adam and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Here ends the reading. May God bless our hearing with understanding.

## Order of Worship

### Call to Worship (inspired by *John 15:1-8*)

Hear the words of Jesus... 'I am the true vine, and God is the vine-grower... Abide in me as I abide in you. I am the vine, you are the branches.'

Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are part of the vine nourished by God, and you are welcome here at \_\_\_\_\_ Church.

Today we celebrate the efforts of all gardeners of the earth to nurture and care for this garden globe upon which we live.

### Song

#### Prayer of Praise & Confession

Pray with me.

Creator of the Universe, Lover of all that you make,  
we thank you for this marvelous world  
which you have given to us for our home.  
May we show our gratitude by our actions  
using the faith we've found to reshape the world around.  
May our hearts and minds be open, like a freshly turned furrow, to  
receive your word.  
May the prayers, songs and reflections we hear today,  
be like seeds planted into our very beings,  
seeds that take root and grow to create in us a garden  
of faith, hope and love.

#### Bible Reading *John 15:1-8 (the vine)*

#### Sharing Time / Children's Message - OPTION 1

Today is a special day at our church. What special day is it today? It's our special blessing of the gardeners and gardens service which we have each spring.

Who has a garden? Do you help in the garden? How do you help?

What did you bring with you today that is connected to gardening? [*seeds, trowels, whatever they have brought*]  
I have something in my bag that is important if you are a gardener. Let's see what I have.

What are these? *Seeds – Sunflower seeds*

Where do you think these came from? *My garden! [Garden Centre/shop]*

What will we do with these seeds? *Plant them.*

*If this service was held previously:*

Last year do you remember, we distributed sunflower seeds at our Blessing of the Gardeners service. Did you get a seed? Did you plant your seed? Did your seed grow?

How tall did the sunflower plants grow?

I have something else in my bag... some photos.

*Show photos.*

What do you see? Yes, VERY TALL and VERY BIG sunflowers that grew from those little seeds last year.

God has made this earth like a big garden, and God has asked each one of us to be a gardener and help keep it healthy and growing.

I hope you will be good gardeners this spring.

Be sure to get a sunflower seed today to take home and plant.

Pray with me.

I will say a line and you repeat it.

Thank you God for seeds.

Thank you God for soil and air.  
Thank you God for gardeners.  
Thank you God for helping seeds grow.  
Thank you God for flowers.

### Sharing Time / Children's Message - OPTION 2

*Food for Thought -- Patience with the coconut tree!* (or Object Lesson if no children are present)

Why do we plant vegetables?

-- to eat them. They taste good! They nurture our bodies.

Why do we plant flowers?

-- to look at. They are beautiful. They nurture our souls.

What's this? -- a coconut

Who plants coconuts? Do you know anyone who plants coconut trees?

The coconut tree is amazing.

- It can grow 100 feet high – 10 floors high!
- It can live for as long as 100 years!

BUT...

- you have to wait up to 10 years before you get the first coconut from it!
- And you have to wait 20 years for it to be producing fully.

You have to be very patient to be a coconut farmer.

So, if we planted a coconut tree today, it would produce its first coconut in 10 years. How old will you be in 10 years?

That is a long time to wait for one coconut.

Coconut farmers have to be very patient.

That is something God wants us to learn as Christians... how to be patient, how to wait for things that take time.

Let's pray. God thank you for vegetables and fruit, and for coconuts. Help us be patient and hopeful and do good things for the future. Amen.

**Song** *Inch by inch, row by row* by Pete Seeger

[https://www.lyricsmania.com/garden\\_song\\_lyrics\\_pete\\_seeger.html](https://www.lyricsmania.com/garden_song_lyrics_pete_seeger.html)

**Blessings of God's Gardeners** (may be read as a litany with up to 5 readers; see alternative version.)

Today, we honour and bless all our gardeners – no matter the extent of your garden. From a basket of market chives on your sill, to a garden by your home, to an allotment, or acres of planted crops. We give thanks for the beauty and order all gardeners bring to God's garden, this earth. If you have brought seeds or bulbs, gloves or other gardening implements, hold them at this time, or place them in your lap. Pray with me.



Divine Gardener, we pause to appreciate the beauty of this earth, your garden, and to recommit ourselves as your gardeners. As you created order out of chaos, you offer us this opportunity to bring order and beauty into our world. Forgive us, for when we have not appreciated the importance of tending your garden, and our actions have resulted in pollution and destruction. Grant us the desire to act in faith to preserve the great variety of nature you have created for us.

Thank you, Creator God, **for this garden Earth.**

Creating God, thank you for the rich fertile soil in which nature awakens new life. May we see in its fertility the promise of new creation.

Thank you, Creator God, **for this garden Earth.**

Nourishing God, thank you for water that cools the earth and hydrates the land. Thank you for the rains that water our efforts to bring forth life. May we see in their constancy your faithful care.

Thank you, Creator God, **for this garden Earth.**

Transforming God, as you created life, so we, too, are invited to participate in this amazing cycle of life by sowing seeds anew.

Nourish, protect, and bless the seeds and bulbs which are sown in hope. May they take root and grow, bringing forth bountiful fruit and beauty. May we see in their flourishing your promise of transformation.

Thank you, Creator God, **for this garden Earth.**

Working God, thank you for our hands and the tools we use to till the soil, to plant the seeds and bulbs, to weed our gardens and allotments. Strengthen us to tend this garden, your earth, with loving care.

Thank you, Creator God, **for this garden Earth.**

Generous God, bless our labour with rain and sunshine, that new life might spring up, to your glory – providing food for the hungry, beauty for our souls, and gardens of calm in our chaotic world. This we pray as your faithful stewards. Amen

### **Alternative Litany for Blessing of God's Gardeners**

**Reader 1: Prayer for the Seeds** (*hold seed or envelope of seeds aloft*) If you have brought seeds or bulbs, hold them at this time. Creating God, you have given seed for the sower.

Nourish, protect, and bless the seeds and bulbs which are sown in hope. May they bring forth bountiful fruit and beauty. Amen.

**Reader 2: Prayer for the Soil** (*hold container of soil aloft*)

Giver of life, thank you for soil in which nature awakens new life. Thank you for the smell of freshly tilled earth, the beauty of a cleanly cut furrow, and a well-ploughed field. Help us to be good stewards of the land. Amen.

**Reader 3: Prayer for Water and Rain** (*hold container of water -- watering can -- aloft*) Sustaining God, thank you for water.

Thank you for the way it cools the earth, and hydrates the land. Thank you for the smell of the earth after the rain has fallen. We ask that the rain come as often as it is needed, so that crops and gardens may flourish. Amen.

### **Reader 4: Prayer of Blessing on tools and gardeners' hands**

(*hold gloves & trowel aloft*) If you have brought gloves or garden tools, hold them at this time. Working God, thank you for our hands and the tools we use to till the soil, to plant the seeds and bulbs, to weed our gardens and allotments. May our efforts be to your glory – providing food for the hungry, beauty for our souls, and gardens of calm in our busy world. Amen.

### **Reader 5: Prayer for Gardening**

Creator of all things and giver of all life, let your blessings fall upon our seeds and bulbs, our hands and tools, our soil, our potted plants, our gardens, our allotments, and our coconuts. Bless our labour with rain and sunshine, that new life might spring up, that we might be truly at one with the integrity of all creation. Convict us as stewards of your magnificent garden to cry out when it is being abused and misused, to stand firm in our conviction to be your appointed custodians. This we pray as your humble servants and stewards of this amazing planet. Amen.

### **Collection of Offering**

**Invitation:** We reap what we sow. Let us share from our abundance to support the ministry and mission of our church. Our gifts will be collected at this time.

**Dedication:** Sower of all life, in this joyous spring season of hope and beauty, we offer our heartfelt thanks for the seeds of promise you have sown in the soil of our lives. Bless our gifts to the service of your people, that all may know abundance and joy. Amen.

### **Song**

## Prayers for our world – OPTION 1

As people of faith, we unite our hearts in prayer for our world.

Pray with me.

God, creator and sustainer of all life, we pray for our world and all your creatures in it. We pray for leaders, local and national, that their words and actions will be sown like seeds, growing into understanding and peace.

Creator of life, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for people facing prejudice and unfair treatment because of who they are, what they look like, what they believe, and how you have created them. Make us brave enough to identify the weeds that threaten to choke and destroy and to speak out against hurt and hate.

Creator of life, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our church, this vine of faith upon which we are all branches. Thank you for those things that are flourishing today because of the seeds of faith and action planted over the generations here in this congregation. May the seeds we plant today be so fruitful.

Creator of life, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our children and youth, for our aging and ill. We pray for ....

Creator of life, **hear our prayer.**

In this moment of silence, we lift up the joys and concerns on our hearts. [*silence*]

Creator of life, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you for hearing our prayers, which we share in faith.

## Prayers for our world – OPTION 2

*Have children distribute a sunflower seed to everyone.*

*As the intercessions are prayed, ask people to focus on their seed and its potential to grow and produce fruit.*

As people of faith, we unite our hearts in prayer for those in need. The prayer response is printed in your notice sheet:

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you, God, for the cycle of life.**

Pray with me.

Jesus said that unless a seed falls to the earth and dies, it cannot bear fruit.

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you, God, for the cycle of life.**

We pray for our church, thanking God for those things that are flourishing. We ask God to show us what needs to die in order for new things to grow. Give us the strength and courage to try new things. Encourage us – and even push us – to let go of ourselves and old ideas so we can fully embrace what is best for our church community to flourish and grow.

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you, God, for the cycle of life.**

We pray for our community, thanking God for those places where people are thriving. We pray for those in need, the unemployed, the housebound or in care facilities, the lonely, those who are ill. Show us how to plant seeds of reassurance in their lives.

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you, God, for the cycle of life.**

We pray for our nation, thanking God for the abundance of food, water and wealth we enjoy. Forgive us, God, for over-indulging, for using more than our fair share. Plant in our hearts seed of generosity and a delight in sharing.

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you God for the cycle of life.**

We pray for the world, your garden of creation.

We pray for those parts of the world that are at war, and especially for refugees and for prisoners...

Show us how to plant seeds of peace, how to cultivate reconciliation, how to encourage understanding in diversity.

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you God for the cycle of life.**

We pray for ourselves, thanking God for those who love us, and those we love. May the prayers of our hearts be seeds of love, growing into a garden of caring action reaching out to those we love, and to all whom you love, though they may be strangers to us. Like our brother Jesus, show us how to shed tears as seeds of compassion, bringing us ever closer to your eternal garden, where love overflows.

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you God for the cycle of life.**

Creator God, as we hold these tiny seeds, show us what needs to die in our lives for new fruit to grow. Make us mindful of the need to act with kindness and truth in your world, to tread softly on your creation, and to plant the seeds of goodness wherever we go. Burn into our hearts Jesus' words: 'Unless a seed falls to the earth and dies, it cannot bear fruit.'

With hope we plant seeds for the future.

**Thank you God for the cycle of life. Amen.**

## Song

**Message: OPTION 1: *The Parable of the Sower***

**Bible Reading** *Mark 4: 2-8, 10, 13-20 (Parable of the Sower)*

**Message/sermon/reflection** (*adapt as necessary*)

What about that gardener!

When we hear the Parable of the Sower, which \_\_\_\_\_ just read, we usually focus on the soil types and the heartiness of the seeds. We talk about fertile soil and stones and weeds. But what about the gardener?

How do you feel about the gardener, the sower?

What do you think about that gardener sowing those seeds?

Find a person near you to share with: (*2 minutes*)

- When you think about this gardener, what do you think about her or him?
- What words might you use to describe them?

*Have people share aloud for all to hear.*

I've always thought the gardener was rather foolish. Persistently foolish. Even wasteful. Why would a gardener sow good seeds on rocky ground? Why would a gardener strew seeds amongst giants weeds that are obviously going to overwhelm the little seeds? Careless? Makes you wonder...

Listen now to these thoughts about the gardener, the sower. This poem is written by Joy Cowley of New Zealand. As I read, consider Joy's perspective, ask yourself what is she saying about the gardener?

**Read:** *The Parable of the Sower* by Joy Cowley, New Zealand (No.10 in *Psalms Down-Under*)

With your partner share what you heard in Joy's poem:

- What did you hear as Joy's main observation about the sower? (*2 minutes*)

*Then ask of congregation:* What would you say is Joy's main observation about the sower? (The sower 'went on sowing.')

The first year we distributed sunflower seeds at this Blessing of the Gardener service, I gave all of them away and forgot to keep one for myself. So that was the end of that planting experience for me.

The second year, I planted the seed, several actually, and that was the end of that planting experience. I never saw a trace of any growth.

Last year I planted 3 sunflower seeds. I forgot all about them. I assumed that was the end of that. Weeks later we discovered something like bamboo growing in one of our garden planter boxes. Straight up! Thick! Tall! It was a mystery. Eventually I looked it up on the internet, describing these tree-like stalks. And guess what! They were ... sunflowers! And miracle of miracles, there were three stalks which eventually bloomed into large, heavy seed-laden sunflowers.

Joy says the sower ‘owned all land with equal love.’ In my case, the soil was basically the same every year. But my job was to keep on sowing, to love each new batch of sunflower seeds and each new box of compost as much as the others.

Where in our lives are we, you and I, being called to keep on sowing, regardless of the terrain on which we find yourselves? Perhaps in our family or here at church. Perhaps at school or at our job. Perhaps regarding a project or goal. What seeds do we have to keep on sowing, in rain or shine, on rocky ground or fertile?

And, flipping the image, where are we or have we been, on that rocky ground, and God has not given up on us? Illness, death, unemployment, failure, divorce, disappointment? ... When have our lives been filled with thorns and weeds, and God continues to sow seeds onto our barren, thorny lives? When have we resisted growth and been closed to the life-giving power of God, yet God continues to shower love and acceptance upon us?

Are we open to welcoming that love, those seeds, with gratitude?

May we all be encouraged by Joy Cowley’s assuring words:

‘Some seeds fell on fertile ground  
and gave a good harvest

First time around, and that was fine,  
But it made no difference to the sower  
Who owned all land with equal love,  
The wayside, the stones, the thistle patch,  
No less than the fertile ground,  
Who tended each one in its season  
And according to its need,  
So that each, in its own time,  
Produced an abundant crop.  
And the sower goes on sowing.’

Pray with me.

Divine Gardener, grant us open hearts to receive the seeds of love and acceptance that you shower upon us. May we cultivate an attitude of gratitude that patiently waits for the thorns to die and decompose, that patiently waits for spring showers to arrive, an attitude fortified by the belief that you will go on sowing your seeds according to our needs.

In turn, reveal to us our place as gardeners beside you and the seeds we have to shower upon others to help them grow in faith and purpose. Grant us the perseverance to go on sowing, trusting in the abundant crop your promise. Amen.

**Message OPTION 2** *Look they are coming! Amrita’s story*  
*Joel 2: 21-24, Genesis 1&2 selected verses*

What are some things you would like to do for our earth/environment?

What are some things you would like to see our country and the world do for the earth and the environment?

Take a moment to think those things over and then share your thoughts with someone near you.

Pray with me. God may the word of my mouth and the thoughts of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You are our creator and sustainer, from you all blessings flow. Amen.

‘Look! There they are! They are coming!’ cries the Khejare village watchman.

Fifteen-year-old Amrita drops her washing and joins others climbing the village high point. Reaching the top of the small rise Amrita looks in the direction that the watch man points. With her sharp eyes she sees the line of men with their axes and saws. She sees the horses pulling the wagons which will soon cart away the timber when the Khajare Forest falls.

A fortnight ago, one of the king’s messengers arrives. He reads the royal decree. ‘In the name of the king, the forest of Khejare will be cut. The king will use your forest timber to build his new palace.’ The king’s messenger takes no questions. He asks for no comments. He rolls up his scroll, mounts his horse and returns to the distant king.

The royal decree stuns the Khejare village people. Their simple village sits on the edge of a great desert. The nearby trees of the forest form an oasis on the desert edge. The trees shelter the village from the harsh desert winds. The trees hold soil and water that the village needs for their delicate environment. The trees provide habitat for birds and animals valued by the village. And besides, fifteen-year-old Amrita and her friends grow up playing amongst the forest trees. Amrita cannot imagine life without the nearby forest. Yet, if the king cuts the trees, life will change for Amrita, for her parents, and for all the villagers of Khejare. But, what can fifteen-year-old Amrita do?

With her sharp eyes Amrita sees the line of men in the distance. She sees their axes and saws. She sees the horses pulling the wagons

which will soon cart away the timber when the Khajare Forest falls. Fifteen-year-old Amrita wrings her hands and wonders: What can I do? Pause...

And God saw that it was good... where do we hear these words over and over and over again in the Bible? And God saw that it was good—in Genesis. Chloe shared it in this morning’s reading. Into this ‘good creation’ God places man and woman. God instructs the man and woman to have dominion-- raw-daw’ is the Hebrew word— raw-daw’ dominion over creation. Raw-daw’ means: to rule over, to subjugate.

One can see where people might read this passage and say, ‘Hey, this means we can do anything we want with creation, because God gives us permission to subjugate, subdue, prevail against creation— cut down the trees for our palaces.

But then... we read and remember that second story of creation, in the next chapter of Genesis. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden. And God took Adam and put him in the garden to till it and keep it. The Psalmist reminds us: The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein... God may have placed us in the garden to till and keep, but the garden still belongs to... God.

This is all Old Testament stuff, and as Christians we seek much of our instructions for how to live from the New Testament. In the Gospels we find the stories of Jesus. In the Gospels we seek to learn how to be good followers of Christ. As we seek to follow Jesus, we place an emphasis upon justice issues that impact humanity: race relations, equality amongst all people, care for children and elderly, care and compassion for the immigrants and aliens in our midst. These are the sort of issues that the Great Commandments encapsulate as we seek to love the Lord our God with all our hearts mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbours... as ourselves.



But seeking to follow Jesus in this day and age, when a growing world population crowds the planet, we need to extend our mindfulness regarding justice beyond our human sisters and brothers, we need to extend our mindfulness to all of God's creatures great and small and to all of creation.

Jesus knows his Bible. He knows that scriptures laud God's creation, scriptures uphold the beauty of the earth. And these very holy words tune Jesus' heart to that beauty. Jesus would have heard Psalm 19: The heavens declare the glory of God. Jesus would know Isaiah 55: all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. And even the Book of Job: But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these creatures does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In God's hand is the life of every creature.

Jesus may not speak directly of environmental issues, as he does not talk directly about racism or gun control or nuclear weapons. Environmental issues...they were few and far between for him. Yet, clearly, Jesus holds an appreciation of God's creation which surrounds him. We hear this confirmed when Jesus declares: Consider the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns; yet God feeds them.

Of course, we see vast changes to the world since the time of Jesus. Population soars. Humanity shifts from an agricultural base to an industrial base. The burning of fossil fuels pumps tons and tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. I remember fifty years ago being told by science teachers that pollutants can cause climate change. Yet, we still have some leaders who naively claim humans could not possibly make a difference. But most scientists agree, burn enough fuel, put enough carbon dioxide into the air, and the climate will...change.

The National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration—NOAA, reports rising temperatures of seas and oceans around the world. Polar ice melts. Sea waters rise threatening to flood small islands and coastal communities. When Cyclone Pam engulfed Vanuatu. Vanuatu's prime minister called the storm, 'a monster!' Then Cyclone Winston slammed into Fiji. These cyclones destroyed decades of development across these island nations. Climate change?

The world has changed since the time of Jesus. I believe his message of Good News about the love and justice of God includes the environment today. Yet many of us still wring our hands, like Amrita in the village of Khejare, and wonder, 'What can I do?' Pause...

Back with Amrita in the village of Khejare, from the village high point Amrita with her sharp eyes, sees the line of men approaching. She sees their axes and saws. She sees the horses pulling the wagons which will cart away the timber when the Khejare Forest falls. Fifteen-year-old Amrita wrings her hands and wonders: 'What can I do?'

Amrita's youthful mind thinks of the one thing she can do to change the fate of her forest. She races down the little hill. She calls out to her friends and the village children, 'The king's men are coming to cut the forest! Come with me! Gather round the trees. We must protect our trees.'

Amrita's friends join her as do all the people of the village. Arms outstretch, they surround the trees. When the woodcutters arrive they find human shields protecting each tree, and indeed the entire forest. They can neither swing their axes nor pull their saws for fear of hurting the villagers themselves. Frustrated, the men leave. When the king hears of the resistance from the villagers his anger burns.

In a rage, he gathers his warriors. He will return to Khejare! He will cut the trees and take the timber by force.

When they see the army approaching, Amrita and the villagers race to the forest. Once again, they form human shields around their beloved trees. The king finds them, impudently, treasonously, hugging the trees of the Khejare Forest. Just as he prepares to give the order to take the trees by force, a fierce wind comes blowing from the desert. Everyone, king and peasant, soldier and child, woodcutter and tree hugger, everyone dashes into the forest. There they shelter from the stormy blast, in the one place that can protect them – amongst the trees of the Khejare Forest.

When the storm abates, when the sands settle, everyone is safe. The king looks with new eyes at the world around him. The king realizes that he and his men would have perished without the protection of these trees. The Khejare villagers-- men, women and children – need the trees to survive.

The king asks, ‘Who decided to defy me and save the trees?’ With one voice the villagers declare, ‘It was Amrita Devi.’ The king says, ‘Amrita Devi, and all you villagers of Khejare... I commend you for your courage and wisdom in protecting this forest. Yes, I want wood for my new palace, but this forest that stands at the desert’s edge is more important to you than a new palace for me. Long may the Khejare Forest stand!’

Amrita Devi’s story is an old story. She lived in India more than 300 years ago. Yet her story and that of the tree-huggers of the Khejare Forest lives on. Today, in India’s on-going struggle to protect their environment, one of the most dedicated groups is the [Chipko Movement](#).

Chipko means: “Hug the Tree”—honouring Amrita and the people of Khejare. Members of Chipko support nonviolent resistance to the

cutting of trees. In 1987, the Chipko Movement received the distinguished Right Livelihood Award (the “alternative Nobel”) for “dedication to the conservation, restoration, and ecologically responsible use of India’s natural resources.”

Around the world we see people and governments concerned about the environment. They may first wring their hands and wonder, ‘What can I do?’ But then they, like Amrita and the villagers, act! People’s behaviour is changing! Ecological conservation legislation is being enacted!

[On Friday 22 April, people around the world observed Earth Day, an event which strives to raise awareness of the fragility of the garden that God planted and our responsibility to care for it—till it and keep it, as it says in Genesis.]

We can all learn to shut off lamps and turn off power points to cut energy consumption. We can learn to use less paper to keep our green forests lush. But we need more. The Australia government has ended incandescent light bulb use. The New Zealand government has ended the distribution of plastic bags at shops and grocers. European governments are instituting legislation to reduce carbon emissions. But we need more. We need governments to deal aggressively with questions about fracking, alternative energy supplies, deforestation. In Genesis God gives Eve and Adam the mandate to care for God’s glorious garden and that mandate is passed on to us.

Today we celebrate gardeners, like many of you, who continue to till the soil, sow the seeds and care for God’s garden. Each seed planted celebrates the hope, the love and the abundance of the garden. As we work for change, let us be committed to both the big picture of environmental care, and the little picture: the plants on

our window sills, the gardens around our homes, and our allotments.

Prayer: Pray with me.

God, we give you thanks for this beautiful garden. This is your world and we acknowledge your sovereignty over it and over-all. Thank you for those who, like Amrita, commit themselves to care for it. Bless all who remind us that we must embrace, hug, your creation with a passion that will not let go. Give us courage to stand up to those who would abuse and misuse creation, courage to make our voices heard and our votes count. Give us strong hearts, strong arms, legs and backs to plant new seeds of life. Remind us to use resources, including energy resources, wisely and not wastefully. What others have passed to us may we preserve and pass on to others. Amen.

Note: There are at least two versions of Amrita's story. In the original version Amrita and hundreds of the villagers are killed. I have used the story version by Deborah Lee Rose, *The people who hugged the trees: an environmental folk tale*. It is available through a Google search as a download. She writes:

*'In the original legend, Amrita Devi and several hundred villagers gave up their lives while protecting their forest, nearly three centuries ago. The Indian government has commemorated their sacrifice by naming the Rajasthani village of Khejare as India's first National Environment Memorial.*

*'Today, the people of India still struggle to protect their environment. One of the most dedicated groups is the Chipko ("Hug the Tree") Movement, whose members support nonviolent resistance to the cutting of trees.*

*'In 1987, the Chipko Movement received the distinguished Right Livelihood Award (the "alternative Nobel"), for "dedication to*

*the conservation, restoration, and ecologically responsible use of India's natural resources.'*

### **Closing Song**

We'll be distributing sunflower seeds during this last song, for you to take and grow for God! Please take seeds to pass on to those not here.

*Distribute a sunflower seed to everyone.*

### **Prayer & Sending forth**

Pray with me.

**Nurturing God, you are the vine and we are the branches.  
You have reached out to us and fed us with your word  
and watered us with the love of community.**

**Use us to spread the seeds of your love and the pollen of peace  
that they may produce an abundant crop throughout the  
world. Amen.**

As we head out into God's bounteous garden, may we each carry a renewed commitment to be God's gardeners, and to keep on sowing!

## Garden Song

Inch by inch, row by row,  
Gonna make this garden grow,  
All it takes is a rake and a hoe,  
And a piece of fertile ground.

Inch by inch, row by row,  
God please bless these seeds I sow,  
God please please warm them from below,  
'Till the rain comes tumblin' down.

Pullin' weeds and pickin' stones,  
We are made of dreams and bones  
Need a spot to call my own  
Cause the time is close at hand.

Grain for grain, sun and rain,  
Find my way in Nature's chain,  
Tune my body and my brain  
To the music from the land.

Plant your rows straight and long,  
Temper them with prayer and song,  
Mother Earth will make you strong  
If you give her loving care.

Inch by inch, row by row,  
Gonna make this garden grow,  
All it takes is a rake and a hoe,  
And a piece of fertile ground

Words and Music by David Mallett  
1975 Cherry Lane Music Publishing

## *In each and every process*

*By George Stuart, Australia*

*Tune Morning Light*

<https://sites.google.com/site/singwithgeorgevol1/home/volume-4/the-cosmos-and-nature/in-each-and-every-process>

The colours of the sunset, the dancing of the waves,  
The majesty of the mountains, the secrecy of the caves –  
They all release a beauty from nature's endless store  
Of fascinating wonders and treasures we adore.

The movement of the earth-worm, the busyness of bees,  
The silent growth of flowers, the patience shown by trees –  
They all release a beauty through nature's charming ways; Like  
all parades of living, they prompt us into praise.

The systems in creation, the life-force here on earth,  
The changing of the seasons encouraging new birth –  
They all release the beauty in nature's throbbing drive  
To be the source confirming the pledge that life will thrive.

We reverently acknowledge that God is surely known  
In each and every process through which our world has grown;  
In God we have our being; in God all comes to be;  
In God are all beginnings; in God our destiny.