DIVINE SERVICE STUDY GUIDE

Created

How does each sermon connect to this theme?

"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2 NRSVUE). The beautiful, sweeping images of creation in the Psalms inspire awe, but also describe our own fragile creaturely condition, compared to them. God is majestic. We are not. The Psalms delight in holding up this majesty and authority, and ask us to reside in their powerful shade. *"There is no speech... yet their voice goes out through all the earth"* (19:3-4). God's grandeur in creation is talking to us. **Created** in His image, He asks us to listen.

The sermons for the month of October, the beginning of our Season of Thanksgiving, will focus on how we respond:

October 4: On the first Sunday, we are in the very beginning, in the Garden of Eden where we find that we were **created to tend and keep,** as stewards of God's beautiful creation.

October 11: For the second Sunday, we move from Genesis to Revelation, and discover that we were **created to praise** God, acknowledging His glory, honor, and power.

October 18: On the third Sunday, the sermon will expound on our being **created to wonder and wait**. The past is full of God's wonderful works, and the future is full of His plans.

October 25: On the fourth Sunday, the well-known verse of John 3:16 confronts us with the truth that we were **created for everlasting life**, reminding us of this declaration of God's unconditional love.

October midweek: Finally, in the sermon chosen for the midweek, the Chief Apostle extends Christ's invitation **to choose freedom**. The narrow gate leads to liberation, peace, and eternal life.

The Season of Thanksgiving brackets a time in the year where we can intentionally make time for reflection, worship, prayer, and gratitude to our Almighty Creator for who He is and what He has done. Approach these coming months with the intent to stir up recognition of God's goodness in your families and congregations.

With thanksgiving,

John S. Schnabel

OCTOBER 2026

October 4

Created...
to tend and keep

October 11

Created...
to praise

October 18

Created...
to wonder and wait

October 25

Created...
for everlasting life

October midweek

Created...
to choose freedom

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DIVINE SERVICE STUDY GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR:

October 4, 2026

FIRST SUNDAY

CREATED...

to tend and keep

Where are we in the Bible?

Genesis 2 begins with the concluding element of the first account of creation from the first chapter - an explanation of the Sabbath. While the creation account in Genesis 1 focuses on organization and structure, the account in Genesis 2 highlights relationships; between God and humans, humans and the earth, humans with each other, and humans and animals. This second chapter also gives us a humbler view of humanity - one that is grounded in the earth itself, and is given the responsibility to tend and keep.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

We are created:

1. "of the ground" (2:7)
2. "to tend and keep" (2:15)
3. without shame (2:25)

Expanding the key themes & relevancy for the life of the believer:

We are created "of the ground" (2:7).

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground..." In Hebrew, this verse forms a wordplay: *ha'adam* is created from *ha'adama* - meaning "the earth creature is formed from the earth." The wordplay underscores the close connection between humans and the earth out of which they are created, which they will care and tend, and to which they will return. It also establishes our connectedness to all living things, as both plants (2:9) and animals (2:19) are also created "out of the ground." These interrelated beginnings should engender feelings of kinship and community when we consider the earth, its abundant life, and our established vocation in caring for it. Further, we are made in God's image (1:26), and placed in the garden with intention and purpose (2:8) - to be God's stewards.

Genesis 2:15

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

Foundational Readings:

Scripture
Genesis 1-2

Catechism
1.1.1, 3.3.1, 3.3.2

We are created "to tend and keep" (2:15).

A deeper look at these two verbs might help us understand our created responsibility more thoroughly. To "tend" can mean to cultivate, to work, but also to serve - literally, "to serve the soil" as subjects. This meaning connects with the idea of stewardship. We are to care for the earth as God's representatives, living as reflections of God's image. We are subjects and stewards, not kings.

To "keep" means to guard, observe, protect, celebrate, and preserve. Creation has paid the price for our disobedience. It suffers because of our rejection of the perfection of God's will in Eden (Romans 8:19-22). We are tasked to protect the creation until, along with all those who believe, it is finally transformed in the end.

We know that this command of God did not become obsolete with humanity's removal from the Garden of Eden, because we can find traces of it throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Mosaic laws. These rules for connected living can shape how we interact with the creation today:

- **Rest is not wasted time or resources; it is trust in God.** Within the laws given for the Promised Land, God established a "land Sabbath" where He commands that the land should be given a "solemn rest" and allowed to lie fallow every seventh year (Leviticus 25:2-4).
- **Abundance is not permission to consume more.** Take only what you need. Scripture instructs that the edges of the field are left for the poor and foreigners (Leviticus 19:9-10). Generosity begins when we stop seeing everything as belonging to us, and truthfully see it as belonging to God.
- **If God cares for what He has made, we should learn to care for it too**. God commands that oxen not be muzzled while they work, so they can eat grain as they labor (Deuteronomy 25:4), and animals are also included in the seventh day Sabbath rest (Deuteronomy 5:12–15). God created specific habitats for the millions of animals that live on this earth. Animals, ecosystems, and vulnerable species are not resources to use up or obstacles to remove.
- **Receive gratefully and consume thoughtfully.** When we pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* we are acknowledging that what sustains us is a gift from God. That should change how we shop, eat, waste, and consume. We can learn to ask, "What did it cost creation and others to provide this?" (1 Cor 10:31)
- **Tend and keep where God has placed you**. In our jobs, in our activities, in our families, we are doing the work of cultivation. To cultivate means to foster growth or improve by our labor - especially for the benefit of others. Like God cultivated the garden in Genesis 1, we create order, we grow, we instruct, we build up, we care for, we encourage. We can do the hard work of tending, and the constant, enduring work of "keeping" or maintaining. Wherever we are we can do our best for God and for each other.

Conclusion: Genesis 2 reminds us that we are not masters of creation but humble creatures of the earth, called to live gratefully and responsibly by tending, protecting, sharing, and preserving the abundant world God has entrusted to our care.

How can we prepare the congregation for Holy Communion?

We are created without shame (2:25).

At the end of the first chapter of Genesis, God looks at everything He created and declares that "it was very good" (1:31). The Hebrew word translated as "good" doesn't mean morally good (versus evil or bad). The sense of the word is *beautiful*, *exquisitely made*, and *valuable* or *of worth*. This is God's view of His creation, of us.

And we know from the end of chapter two, that the shame that exists in our world, whether it is the shame we pile on ourselves, or the shame that is heaped on us by society or by others, was not part of God's plan. And yet, shame is part of our human experience; it wears us down, it makes us afraid, it ruins relationships. Through Christ, who came to earth to reconcile us with God, we are called back to our original goodness. We are called to be gracious restorers rather than perpetuators of shame in others. We can again be without shame because God embraces us as beautiful, exquisite, worthy, valuable, enough.

DIVINE SERVICE STUDY GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR:

October 11, 2026

SECOND SUNDAY

CREATED... to praise

Where are we in the Bible?

The visions in the Book of Revelation reveal Jesus Christ in several profound ways: as the divine Shepherd who cares deeply for the condition of His church, as the righteous Judge who will ultimately punish evil, and as the triumphant King who will establish His kingdom and reign for all eternity.

Chapter 4 opens with a scene in heaven. John is given a vision of God seated upon His throne, surrounded by heavenly beings who worship Him day and night without ceasing. Their worship declares the holiness, majesty, and worthiness of God. Our Bible verse today (4:11) is one of their songs of worship recorded in Revelation.

Chapter 5 continues this scene of heavenly worship, now focusing on the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Angels, elders, and living creatures join together in declaring the worthiness of the Lamb. The worship of heaven therefore moves from the Creator upon the throne in chapter 4 to the Lamb who was slain in chapter 5, revealing that the Father and the Son are both worthy of the worship, glory, honor, and power of all creation.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Glory
2. Honor
3. Power

Revelation 4:11

You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.

Foundational Readings:

Scripture
Revelation 4:1-11

Catechism
1.1.1

NOTE:

"You are worthy... <u>to receive</u> glory and honor and power..." The Greek word *lambano*, translated here as "receive" has a broader meaning. It can mean to take, to take in hand, to seize, to assume, to have in full - giving the connotation that God possesses these attributes. They are His. We do not give them to Him, but rather recognize that He has, in full, glory, honor, and power.

Expanding the key themes & relevancy for the life of the believer:

It becomes clear that God is the Author of creation, its goal, and its fulfilment. Creation continues to exist by His will and is continually led toward fulfilment by Him. As the created, we cannot give or add anything to God; rather, we are called to acknowledge who He is and reflect upon what belongs to Him. When we recognize God as our Creator and our place within His creation, we are brought into alignment with His godly norms. Otherwise, we live an incongruent life, apart from Him. Ultimately, He is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power.

Glory – We recognize God's glory by making Him known.

- We tell of His truths (Psalm 96:3-6).
- We acknowledge His realities (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- We worship Him in the beauty of holiness (Psalm 29:1-2).

Honor - We recognize God's honor by placing Him first.

- We approach Him with reverence and holy respect (Revelation 4:8).
- We obey His commands of love (John 14:15).
- We thank Him for all that He has given and all that He has not given, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we share what we have with others (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19).

Power – We recognize God's power by yielding to His reign and kingship.

- We trust in His providence (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- We submit to His eternal will (Matthew 6:10).
- We proclaim His mighty works (Psalm 105:1-2).

Romans 1:20–21 gives a solemn warning to those who, although they knew God, chose not to glorify Him or give thanks to Him. Such a path leads to futile thinking and the darkening of the heart.

We must continually heed this warning and remember that we have been created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). This truth should serve as our starting point and encourage us to live with hope and purpose, reflecting His image in our lives and seeking to bring glory, honor, and power to our great God.

Conclusion: As those created in the image and likeness of God, we are called to recognize His rightful place as Creator and to live in grateful submission to His will. May our lives continually reflect His glory, honor, and power, acknowledging that He alone is worthy to receive them.

How can we prepare the congregation for Holy Communion?

Vain glory

"Fear is the root of *vain glory* (conceit) and selfish ambition. Selfish ambition grows out of the fear of not receiving enough… fear of not being recognized. It is out of fear that people hoard money and possessions. Driven by fear, one hungers for recognition and honor. "Perfect love casts out fear" 1 John 4:18. This love has a face: Jesus Christ. He humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross. That is why God exalted Him and gave Him the greatest honor (Philippians 2:6-11). Christ's humility is for you. He esteems you higher than Himself. He sees your needs and gives you everything: His love" (CA Mutschler, Karlsruhe 2026).

DIVINE SERVICE STUDY GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR:

October 18, 2026

THIRD SUNDAY

CREATED...

to wonder and wait

Where are we in the Bible?

Psalm 40 is a psalm of David that combines thanksgiving for God's past deliverance with a renewed prayer for help. David begins by remembering how he waited patiently for the Lord and how God heard him, rescued him, and gave him a new song of praise. In verse 5, David reflects beyond his own experience and recognizes the countless works and thoughts of God toward His people. God's faithfulness cannot be fully measured or recounted because His activity extends far beyond what any one person can see. The psalm then turns toward faithful obedience, emphasizing that devotion to God involves more than outward offerings. Together, these verses invite believers to remember God's past activity and confidently trust His continuing care.

Psalm 40:5

Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Psalm 40

Catechism
8.2.8, 8.2.11, 12.1.5.1

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. The past is full of His works
2. The future is full of His promises

Expanding the key themes:

The past is full of His works

- *I waited patiently for the Lord; and <u>He inclined to me</u>, and heard my cry* (40:1). Looking back, we recognize the moments when God turned toward us and heard our cries. Here, "inclined" conveys a sense of God bending down, turning His attention towards David, and us. His past works remind us that He is not distant or indifferent; He has met us where we are, listened with compassion and responded according to His wisdom and love.
- *He also <u>brought me up</u> out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and <u>established my steps</u>* (40:2). God has brought us through circumstances in which we felt stuck, uncertain, or unable to find our own way forward. <u>In these</u>

moments, we realize that we cannot save ourselves, but rather are God-dependent. When we look back, we can see how He provided stability, direction, and a firm foundation, even when the path ahead was not immediately clear.

- *He has put a new song in my mouth - Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord* (40:1-3). Remembering what God has done produces a response: praise. True praise makes us aware of God and His wonderful works. The "new song" reflects a renewed recognition of God's goodness; what we have experienced personally becomes a testimony that can strengthen the faith of others. And when we forget God's goodness in our lives, we can turn to the Holy Spirit to bring it to remembrance.

The future is full of His promises

- *Let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me* (40:11b). Because God has preserved and sustained us in the past, we can face the future with confidence in His continued care. His preservation does not mean that we will be spared every difficulty, but that no circumstance can prevent Him from accompanying us and sustaining our faith as He leads us toward salvation.
- *I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation;* (40:10a). God's saving activity is not limited to what He has already done; He continues His work of salvation and will bring it to completion. We can look toward the future with confidence, trusting that through Jesus Christ, God is leading us toward complete fellowship with Him.
- Our hope reaches beyond the circumstances and limitations of this present life. God promises eternal life in His presence, where our fellowship with Him will be complete and the effects of sin, suffering, and death will finally be overcome.

How is this relevant for the life of a believer?

Believers live between what God has already done and what He has promised still to do. Waiting on God is not passive; it is an active posture of trust in which we remain attentive to His presence and activity. Being a posture of wonder and praise toward God sensitizes us to what He is already doing in our lives; without this awareness, we could begin looking for "wow moments" according to our own standards and overlook His daily works of grace. Therefore, we should count our blessings each day and seek God not only in extraordinary circumstances, but as the One who accompanies, preserves, and provides for us every day. He is not simply an "emergency God."

Psalm 40:11–17 reminds us that even after David recalls God's wonderful works, uncertainty and trouble remain; a life with God does not mean a life without tribulation. Remembering His past faithfulness gives us confidence to wait, praise, and trust in the present, knowing that He continues to lead us toward salvation.

Conclusion: God's works in the past give us reason to praise Him today and confidence to trust His promises for the future. Even in times of uncertainty and tribulation, we remain attentive to His daily activity, knowing that He continues to preserve us.

How can we prepare the congregation for Holy Communion?

The celebration of Holy Communion is both a meal of remembrance (CNAC 8.2.8) and a meal of the future (CNAC 8.2.11). It is at this intersection of past and future that we are thankful and wonder at all that God has done and actively wait and anticipate what He has yet to do. The power, life, and virtue in Holy Communion strengthens us and equips us to endure as we strive to become more like Jesus, until His return.

DIVINE SERVICE STUDY GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR:

October 25, 2026

FOURTH SUNDAY

CREATED...

for eternal life

Where are we in the Bible?

The 3rd chapter of John begins as a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Even though Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night in an effort to conceal his connection with Christ, he quickly expresses his awareness of Christ's significance in verse 3: *"…we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him."* From there, the conversation centers on what it means to be born again, and highlights the eternal implications of being born of water and the Spirit (3:5).

Some biblical writers consider the final section of the chapter (3:16-21) as a shift from a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodeums to a monologue centered on Jesus alone. It opens with one of the most well-known verses in all of Scripture, where the divine intention embodied by Jesus and His mission is summarized, and God's fundamental love for the world is declared.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. God's love
2. God's gift
3. God's mercy
4. God's condition

Expanding the key themes & relevancy for the life of the believer:

God's love

The declaration of God's fundamental love for the world hearkens back to the creation motif that pulses throughout the Fourth Gospel. John's good news is that the world that came into being through the *Logos* (1:1) remains the object of divine love. This divine love of God is a love that goes far beyond human love, and is initiated by Him.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Foundational Readings:

Scripture
John 3:1-21

Catechism
9.6-9.6.3

Whereas our love is often narrow, contingent, limited, and temporary, God's love is expansive, unconditional, sacrificial, and binding. He *is* love, as Scripture testifies (1 John 4:8).

John 3:16 doesn't begin "God so loved the church," "or God so loved the faithful," or "God so loved the pure." It begins as a love letter to the world, and this includes those who have turned away from Him. God's will to save is universal; no one is excluded (1 Timothy 2:4-6). Humanity's need for a Savior is also universal; no one can free themselves from sin. We all need the grace God provides through His Son, Jesus Christ.

God's gift

God's love is expressed in the giving of what was most dear and precious to Him: His one and only Son. It was not humankind who took the first step toward God. Rather, it was God who reached out to humanity in love. We would expect the creation to give back in love to its Creator, but instead it's the Creator who, in Jesus, reaches out to a lost and broken creation.

God's love thus comes to expression in the complete devotion and self-denial of the Son (Philippians 2:6-11). Although Jesus didn't renounce His divine nature, He gave up His glory. As sinners, we struggle to give up our glory. We have a hard time letting go of our pride, ego, and the need to take credit for our own success. In the example of Christ, may we stop chasing personal status and recognition, and instead "give up our glory" for the purposes of God. Besides glory, we often must leave behind our comfort zone as God calls us to obey and submit ourselves to His will.

God's mercy

The mercy of God is summarized here: *"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* Mercy is when we don't receive the punishment that we deserve. Because of our sin, we deserve to perish, and to be eternally separated from God. However, our merciful God desires that all would be saved and experience eternal life. No one is excluded from this opportunity, including those in eternity. God has not forgotten a single soul.

Thankfully, and as expressed in another hymn, "Our sins they are many, but His mercy is more." What a life-changing truth for both the visible and invisible congregations!

God's condition

There is a condition when it comes to eternal life, however, and it's belief in Jesus Christ. Not all who are perishing want this life nor trust the One who offers it. Therefore, there is a stipulation given, and a dividing line placed between those who put their faith and trust in Christ, and those who choose not to.

Our faith is the response to God's salvific activity in the mission of Jesus Christ. This faith is to be evident and ongoing; it's not a one-time event. In chapter 21, John concludes His Gospel by telling the story of the final encounter between Peter and the risen Jesus. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, and three times He responds to Peter's answer with instruction to care for His people. It is only after this exchange that Jesus says to Peter, *"Follow me."* In the end, belief-turned-into-action surpasses passive belief in Jesus.

Conclusion: Even though God created us for eternal life, the choice is ultimately ours to make. We choose to live eternally with God or eternally without Him, and this gift of choice is a wonderful yet weighty responsibility. As we draw closer to service for the departed next Sunday, let's pray that many will make the right choice—belief in Jesus Christ, and everlasting life with Him.

DIVINE SERVICE STUDY GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR:

October 21/22

MIDWEEK SERVICE

CREATED...

to choose freedom

Where are we in the Bible?

If we start at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, everything that we would have read so far leads us to expect the conclusion that following Jesus is going to be demanding. Jesus' teaching to "enter by the narrow gate" reveals that the way of discipleship is the difficult road. From the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, we know what characterizes this choice; it is a way of life that is extraordinary. This is the life of the Beatitudes; it is the city set on a hill; it is the life of going the second mile, turning the other cheek, love, purity, truthfulness, and meekness. It is a way of life known by its fruits.

The narrow gate and the difficult way are what it means to have an exclusive attachment to Jesus, for He is the only way. But this way is paved with grace, because it is Christ who calls us to it.

The Chief Apostle has taken a pastoral frame of reference for this verse in casting it as an invitation to the nobodies, to those who have lost trust, to the burdened, to the overwhelmed. As preachers, notice that he speaks to the emotion or feeling behind individual situations. As we consider the condition of the souls in our congregations, we should take care not to preach to specific circumstances of life (schooling choices, illnesses, job loss, etc.), but rather directly to the felt emotions of those circumstances. For instance fear, pride, guilt, or grief.

Further, we should not get too caught up in the warnings of the wide gate or false prophets. The Chief Apostle acknowledges the difficulty of the narrow gate, but points to the solidarity of Christ and reassures us, that we are not alone on this difficult path. His message is filled with liberation, hope, and encouragement. We are called to enter the narrow gate, not as a once-in-a-lifetime decision, but rather in moment-by-moment experiences of life. Again and again we make the conscious commitment to Christ, who guides, sustains, and gives us joy on the journey.

Matthew 7:13 (excerpt)

Enter by the narrow gate.

Foundational Readings:

Scripture
Matthew 7:13-14

Catechism
3.4.8.4

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