



Starters for Sunday, 9th September 2012

Creation Time Resources Day Two

Breathed into Being

And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.”
... and God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning —the
second day. ~ *The Book of Genesis*

[Genesis 1: 1 – 8](#)

[Ezekiel 37: 1 – 14](#)

[Psalm 19: 1 – 6](#)

[John 3: 1 – 5](#)



Introduction to Theme

We have lots of air and sky and wind in Scotland, perhaps sometimes too much. People living in the north and west know how windy Scotland can be and understand the danger of violent Atlantic storms.

Yet people have been living on Orkney for at least 5,000 years and while it is a windy place it has also supported and nourished a population for all of that time. What is believed to be the oldest house in northern Europe is on the island of Papa Westray; and on the Orkney mainland at Stenness, recent archaeological digs have discovered places of worship of great antiquity, dating from long before the Christian era.



The early Christian chapel of St. Boniface stands on Papa Westray. The Vikings were a threat but the Norse earls, initially hostile, were soon won over to the Christian faith. The cathedral church of St. Magnus in Kirkwall celebrates the Norse Christian tradition.

The skies above Orkney contain an extraordinary richness of birds; cliff nesting seabirds, farmland birds and migrants passing through like the arctic tern, a small bird with an astonishing annual passage from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back again. So while the windswept skies can be violent so can they be a source of wonder and wealth. Wind turbines, disliked by some, are now helping islanders to generate energy and an income for the community, a harvest from the sky to add to that of the land and sea.

‘A thin place’ was the description of Iona by George Macleod, founder of the Iona Community; a thin place between sea and sky but also a thin place between the physical and spiritual world, between the earth and heaven. It is no coincidence that early Christian settlements are found in some of Scotland’s most remote places where the land, sky and sea offer such a rich awareness of the relationship between physical creation and spiritual awareness.



Introduction to Passages

We take it completely for granted every day – the gift of air, without which we could not survive for one moment.

Three images come to mind, however, as a corrective to this perhaps rather arrogant assumption.

It is many years now since we were all able to see, from the photographs taken by the early astronauts, our planet from the outside, as it were – the unforgettable shots of our beautiful blue home, surrounded by all this oxygen which gives us our breath, and set in a vast black sea of space – within which, of course, we humans would be unable to live, unsupported, for a second.

Some years ago, the Scots poet Hugh McDiarmid wrote what I have always found a most powerful reflection on the fragility of our planet, and its relation to the rest of creation :

“Mars is braw in crammasay,
 Venus in a green silk gown,
 The auld mune shak's her gowden feathers,
 Their starry talk's a when o' blethers,
 Nane for thee a thochtie spairin'
 Earth, thou bonnie broukit bairn!
 – *But greet, an' in your tears ye'll droun*

The haill canjamfrie!”

A second image that comes to mind is of the amazing sight of watching my children being born – and seeing them each take their first breath – joining the human race in that exultant, life-enhancing cry.



And lastly, an image I will never forget – of watching my mother as she took her last, rasping breath, and let her life, finally, go, as the air left her body for the last time.

Here are some Bible passages to help us reflect on this amazing gift of air, of breath.

Genesis 1: 1 – 8

After light and darkness, the story-teller of Genesis sees God creating Sky. Interestingly, the narrator sees Sky as being created in order to separate the waters above the dome from the waters below the dome. We have long since abandoned that “three-tier” picture of the universe; but we still know that we are air-breathing creatures, and we need to live protected from “the waters”, within which we would drown.

What's more, of course, we now know so much more about the need to have clean air to breathe, if we are to continue to inhabit the planet which is our home. Air pollution, caused by exhaust fumes of vehicles, and pollutants given off by construction work and industry, is estimated to cause about two million premature deaths each year in cities across the world (World Health Organisation). We each breathe about two gallons of air every minute of every day, so thinking carefully about the quality of the air we breathe makes serious sense. Two other studies add weight to this argument. Living in major cities, one study has found, places people at a higher risk than living in the radioactive zone of Chernobyl; and a Scottish study has shown that jogging with traffic all around results in reduced blood flow to the heart, which is particularly dangerous for people with stable heart disease.

So thinking about the state of the air we breathe – and taking sensible steps to help reduce its pollution – is basically both about caring for ourselves and also caring for creation.

Ezekiel 37: 1 – 14

This famous parable of the Valley of Dry Bones brings to mind a sobering visit we made a few years ago to the Jewish Holocaust Memorial in the Pinkas Synagogue in the Czech capital of Prague. When you go in, the first thing you hear is the sound of a quiet taped voice, reading over and over again the names of the thousands of citizens of Prague who, because they



were Jewish, were murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War. And then as your eyes grow accustomed to the subdued light, you become aware – I have it on a postcard in front of me as I write – of the names of these human beings – I don't how many thousands of them – all written on the walls of the synagogue, gathered in their families, perhaps three or four generations each, all together now, all murdered, always remembered.

“Can these bones live?”, the prophets hears the Lord asking. And I came away, wondering, not only about the way in which the Nazis sought to deny so many of their fellow human beings the right to life and breath, but also about the way in which some of the descendants of these murdered Czech citizens seem now to be seeking to deny the right to life and freedom of *their* fellow human beings, in Israel/Palestine. And the challenge to all of us to keep alert to the constant danger of assuming that one group or another can have any sort of a monopoly over the right to life, and breath, and freedom, of another.

Psalm 19: 1 – 6

Johannes Scottus Eriugena, the philosopher/theologian of the High Middle Ages, was the one who famously reminded us that God speaks to us through “two Books; the Big Book of Creation, and the Little Book of the Scriptures”. And this Psalm reminds us, first of all, that we need to be willing to hear God speaking to us in the daily life of the created world – not only in the wonders of nature, but also in the carefully tended city garden, or even in the struggling dandelion pushing up through a crack in the pavement – as well as hearing God speaking to us through the pages of the Bible.

Our Celtic ancestors were good at this. Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* – a unique collection of hymns and incantations collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland over the course of the Nineteenth Century (Floris Books, 1992) – is a treasure store of examples of this, of course drawn from a rural community very conscious of its past traditions. Three modern writers, Mary Low (*Celtic Christianity and Nature*, Edinburgh University Press, 1996), John J O'Riordain (*The Music of What Happens, Celtic Spirituality: A View from the Inside*, The Columba Press, 1996), and J. Philip Newell (*The Book of Creation, An Introduction to Celtic*



Spirituality, Canterbury Press, 1999), are among many who offer helpful reflections on the same theme.

Nor is this all primarily about some romantic sense of the beauty of nature. The Celtic Christians were anything but romantics. In his book already mentioned, J. Philip Newell entitles his reflections on this second day of creation, “The Wildness of God”, and he writes:

“The Celtic tradition has a strong sense of the wildness of God. Like nature, it is unrestrainable. A true worship of God, therefore, can neither be constrained within the four walls of a sacred building, nor restricted to the boundaries of of religious tradition.” (*The Book of Creation*, page 20.)

And that great hymn, St. Patrick's Breastplate (*Church Hymnary 4*, No. 639), reflects the same theme in the third verse:

“I bind unto myself today
 the virtues of the star-lit heaven,
 the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
 the whiteness of the moon at even,
 the flashing of the lightning free,
 the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
 the stable earth, the deep salt sea around the old eternal rocks.”

I have, in my time, conducted the funeral service of a young man from the island of Iona who, along with three companions, was drowned in a wild winter storm while crossing the normally calm and beautiful mile-long Sound of Iona, which separates the island from its neighbouring Isle of Mull. I believe we are right, therefore, both to look for God's word to us in the natural world – while at the same time remaining in awe of nature, which can, as the poet has reminded us, at times be “red in tooth and claw”. (*Tennyson*)



John 3: 1 – 5

In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this well-known passage, he offers this for verse 5:

“Jesus said, 'You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this *original creation* (my italics) – the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life – it's not possible to enter God's kingdom.' “

As so often, Peterson nudges us, it seems to me, towards a deeper meaning of a passage with which we are so familiar. What is Jesus really saying? This is not, I think, a call to become a Christian. Nor is it a call to become particularly religious. Rather, is it not a summons to be what God has always intended us to be from the beginning – fully, joyously, generously human? A call to submit ourselves to being taken over by the “original creation” which comes from God, is found in Jesus, through the Spirit – the original creation as depicted in the Garden of Eden myth, where the prototype humans lived in complete harmony with the original creation all around them, in the garden of the world, new made.

I am reminded of the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian murdered by the Nazis in 1945 for his part in the plot to assassinate Hitler:

“The Christian is not a religious person, but simply a human being, as Jesus was a human being, profoundly this-worldly, characterised by discipline, and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection.”

If we are to play our part to the full in the struggle to sustain the energy that abounds in our planet – the energy that we need to live, that we need to ensure is available for our children and their children after them – then the call to humanity is the one we surely need to hear. For it is only as we see in ourselves and in every neighbour, near at hand and far away, another human being made, like us, in God's image, that we will be spurred on to work with heart and soul and mind and strength, to ensure that they, with us, can breathe God's good



air, walk with dignity and prosperity on God's earth, and sense the mystery that is behind and within the whole of creation.

“Oh, the life of the world is a joy and a treasure,
unfolding in beauty the green-growing tree,
the changing of seasons in mountain and valley,
the stars and the bright restless sea.

So give thanks for the life and the love of the Maker,
and rejoice in the gift of the bright risen Son,
and walk in the peace and the power of the Spirituality
till the days of our living are done.”

(Church Hymnary 4, No 141, verses 1 and 4).

Prayers and Responses

Collect

Stir up, Oh Lord,
The wills of your faithful people,
That richly bearing the fruit of good works,
We may by you be richly rewarded;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who is alive and reigns
With you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever.



A Responsive Liturgy

Leader Loving Creator,
 you care for the land by sending rain;
 you make it fertile and fruitful.
 What a rich harvest you provide!

All *All your creation sings for joy.*

Leader When we take care of the land,
 sowing the seed and reaping the harvest,

All *All your creation sings for joy.*

Leader When we keep streams and rivers clean,
 when we respect the purity of lakes and seas,

All *All your creation sings for joy.*

Leader When we recognise that we are one family,
 brothers and sisters together,
 with responsibility for the land and the waters,

**All *All your creation sings for joy
 for you bless us abundantly all our days.***

(Per Harling, from *Gloria Deo, Prayers & Hymns for the 12th Assembly of CEC, 2003*
 Reproduced by ECEN for *Creation Time 2005*)

Another Second Liturgy

Leader We light a light to God, the Creator,
 who lit the light in the cosmos
 and breathed life into the creation.
(A light is lit)

Leader We light a light to Jesus Christ,



and light of the world,
our hope and rescue.

(A light is lit)

Leader We light a light to the Holy Spirit,
who sets our faith on fire
and gives us courage to follow the truth.

(A light is lit)

(Per Harling. Reproduced by ECEN for Creation Time 2001)

Scottish Blessing

May the blessing of light be on you - light without and light within.

May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire,
so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it.

And may light shine out of the two eyes of you,
like a candle set in the window of a house,
bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.

And may the blessing of the rain be on you,
may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean,
and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines,
and sometimes a star.

And may the blessing of the earth be on you,
soft under your feet as you pass along the roads,
soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day;
and may it rest easy over you when, at last, you lie out under it.

May it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly; up and off and
on its way to God.

And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly. Amen.



Creation Time Prayer

This model is based on 'Appreciative Inquiry' and offers time for silent reflection on the theme of each of the seven days. It allows the worship leader to support the congregation through a more reflective and quiet time of prayer, best placed after the sermon. This structure below gives the main stages to go through, in as unhurried a fashion as possible.

The hope of this form of prayer is that we connect with what sustains and draws us towards that which is good, rather than dwelling upon and being paralysed by the things that weigh on us or feel beyond our capacity to change.

[1] **Decide the theme of your prayer, for example**

- being aware of the sources of our energy
- being concerned about our use of water
- the times when we thought about food and how we use it

[2] **Settling and beginning the Prayer**

Do this in a way that is familiar to your congregation, spend time addressing God and naming the theme of the prayer. The language below may seem unusual, but acts as a prompt for people to pray, rather than a script for leading the prayer. It can of course be adapted to suit.

In prayer recalling when

- I consciously thought of how I was using energy
- how that energy was created
- how those thoughts moved me to action
-

Silent reflection

[3] In prayer remembering how I felt when I made an effort to conserve energy

Silent reflection

[4] In prayer imagining how I would feel if I made another effort to conserve energy

Silent reflection

[5] In prayer making the commitment, promising God, that I will act

Silent reflection

Ending the prayer, entrusting our lives into God care and love.



Music Suggestions

These suggestions could work for any of the seven days of these Creation Time resources. Suggestions specific to each day are also found below.

Songs for use throughout Creation Time

Called by earth and sky (printed here with permission)



Called by Earth and Sky page 1 PDF.pdf



Called by Earth and Sky page 2 PDF.pdf

We Walk his Way

[Wild Goose Resource Group](#)

Know that God is good

CH4 788

The peace of the earth

CH4 798

God's love is for everybody

CH4 765

Mayenziwe - Your will be done on earth, O Lord

CH4 805

Lord your hands have formed this world

CH4 140

Here I am Lord

CH4 251

Enemy of Apathy

CH4 593

God's will for creation

CH4 136

Heaven shall not wait

CH4 362

Let all creation dance (alt. tune 60)

CH4 149



Songs for today's theme

Over my head	CH4 575
All Things Bright and Beautiful	CH4 137
All Creatures of Our God and King	CH4 147
The Spacious Firmament on High	CH4 148
Sing to God with Gladness	CH4 150

Additional Resources

A video on 'Why should we care about climate change?'

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjwmrg__ZVw

Nurture in his Name is a short series from the Church of England and RCC.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zli73tMV-Do>



Acknowledgements and Thanks

The Mission and Discipleship Council and Church and Society Council would like to thank the group writers who have produced these Creation Time Materials.

They are **Rev John Harvey, Ruth Burgess, Margaret McLarty and Rev Malcolm Rooney.**

For further information regarding Climate Change issues and resources please contact the Church and Society Council through **Adrian Shaw**, Climate Change Officer, ashaw@cofscotland.org.uk

Visit the climate change pages of the Church of Scotland website:

http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/speak_out/care_for_the_earth

Become an eco-congregation. Find out more at :<http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org>

- Eco-congregation Scotland (ECS) module 2:
<http://uploads.ecocongregationscotland.org/uploads/m2.pdf>
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/CJB/295>
- European Christian Environment Network
(ECEN) <http://www.ecen.org/uploads/creationtimeliturgy08.pdf>

For further information about Starters for Sunday, please contact the Faith Expression Team through **Anna Reid**, Senior Administrator, areid@cofscotland.org.uk

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.