



## Starters for Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2012

### Creation Time Resources Day Three

#### The Food that Sustains Us

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds. ” And it was so. And there was evening, and there was morning - the third day. ~ *The Book of Genesis.*

[Genesis 1: 1 – 13](#)

[Exodus 16](#)

[Psalm 104: 14 – 35](#)

[Matthew 6: 19 – 34](#)



## Introduction to Theme

Do we take our food for granted? Almost certainly yes, in an age when convenience shopping in large supermarkets has become the norm and the alienation of urban consumers from the growing of their food is almost complete.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments food and eating together are part of worship and faith. In the Passover meal, in the story of Ruth gathering grain from the fields after the harvest has been collected, in the dietary rules of the Old Testament the connection between land, food and faith is very clear. The central role of bread and wine in the communion service recognises the central role of food and social interaction in the Christian gospel.

In Genesis and throughout the Bible food is described as a gift from God but when we are shopping in a supermarket the items on the shelves appear to be more like commodities than gifts. We need to understand that food is not just a cheap commodity but also a gift; part of this understanding is in the preparation of food itself; taking raw ingredients to make a meal rather than using ready-made dishes. Shopping is not just a matter of getting the best bargain but the best “treasure” that will be good for our health and caring for the environment. In many instances the cheapest and healthiest items are fresh vegetables of the season but if we lack the skill and knowledge to prepare and cook them then we deny ourselves this best option.



Food and drink are the gifts of creation; we take them for granted at our peril.



## Introduction to Passages

We all know, broadly speaking, the huge challenges that face the world in relation to food. At least a third of the world's population do not have enough food, or have the wrong sort of food. In the Western world, we generally eat too much, and often eat the wrong sort. Connections are beginning to be made (although mainly at government, academic, and campaigning level) between food sustainability, food production, food distribution, and the use of the fundamental planetary resources for growing food, like water, soil and air. But at street level, certainly in the UK, there is little evidence that people are changing their habits to any significant degree. Mostly, we are moved to give money to charities from time to time, and feel helpless when we see frightening pictures of starving children on our TV screens. And this despite the growing popularity of food programmes on the television – some of which, when placed alongside the desperate hunger of so many in other countries, can feel almost blasphemous at times.

The writers of the Bible have a fair bit to say about food. Here are some texts which you may find helpful, as you approach this subject with worship in mind.

### Genesis 1: 1 – 13

In this great myth of creation, food comes high up on the agenda – in Day Three. (Richard Rohr, the American Franciscan spiritual writer and activist, says of myths: “Our myths are stories or images that are not always true in particular but entirely true in general. They are usually not historical fact, but invariably they are spiritual genius.” Richard Rohr, “Falling Upward”, Jossey-Bass, 2011,. This is how I regard the Genesis creation stories.)

The order of creation here is important. In this first creation myth (Genesis 1: 1 -2: 4) human beings come low down in the pecking order – created only on Day Six, once all that was required for life on earth had been created first. Sometimes, this has been taken to mean that the creation of human beings was the pinnacle of God's creative activity. To my mind, it's the other way round; human beings come last, because for a start we are, when you come to think of it, totally *dependent* on the rest of creation for our lives. And interestingly, in the second creation myth (Genesis 2: 5 – 25), the writer sets his story in a garden, with the implication, to my mind at least, that human beings are tasked with being good gardeners, rather than despoilers of the planet's resources.

One verse in the first creation myth – verse 28 – has caused endless difficulties. It is usually translated (I am using the NRSV):

*“God blessed them, and God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the*



*earth and subdue it; and 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.' "*

“Dominion” and “subdue” sound like pretty aggressive words; and have been used to justify some pretty aggressive behaviour on the part of human beings, in relation to the planet's resources, over the centuries. I like Eugene H. Petersen's paraphrase here, though, where he has God making human beings “to *reflect our nature*”, and tasks us with “*being responsible*” for the fish and the birds and every living thing. (The Message.) Being responsible for the food that God has created, well before God got round to creating us, in the myth at least, makes a lot of sense, in the context of sustainability!

## Exodus 16

Surprise, surprise! It's hardly six weeks since the Israelites have made their escape from slavery in Egypt, and here they are, complaining about food! It was Napoleon Bonaparte who remarked cynically that “an army marches on its stomach”; witnessing to the eternal truth, that food is very often the most important issue for any group of people, whether it be an army or a bunch of refugees or a family or a monastic community or whatever.

So here, in the Exodus story, we are taught two other crucial lessons about food; there is always enough to go round, and stashing it selfishly away doesn't work.

Verse 18: “*But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.*” Enough is enough – God intends that we share our food so that everyone's needs are met, a lesson which is reinforced in the New Testament, for instance, in the story of the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew 14: 13 – 21, where there is enough *and to spare*; and in Acts 4: 32 – 34, where a feature of the early church is that everyone shares, and everyone's needs are met.

Try this: place a bowl of crisps or sweets on a table, and set two people on either side of it, each with a very long-handled spoon, which they are only allowed to hold at the very end of the handle. Tell them to help themselves, with their spoon, to the contents of the bowl. When they eventually realise that the only way to get the contents of the bowl to their mouths is to *feed each other*, they will have learnt a powerful lesson in food sharing!

Verse 19: “*And Moses said to them, 'Let no one leave any over until morning.' But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul.*” What does this mean – that we are not to have store cupboards or freezers? Or, in the context of



the Exodus story, and setting it alongside the third petition in the Lord's Prayer (which in the alternative reading is “*give us our bread for tomorrow*”) does it simply reinforce the earlier lesson, that God's good purpose for all of God's people is that we should all be confident that our food needs will be met *utterly adequately* if we trust God as the Giver and share food generously with our Neighbour? With the twist in the tail being that if we don't live in that confidence, then our lives are likely to descend into staleness and mould. (Butter mountains come to mind – and I once heard an American friend of mine, as we drove together across the wheatfields of the mid-West, say despairingly: “Look at all this! We could feed the world, if only we had the will..!”)

### Psalm 104: 14 – 35

Who says grace before meals nowadays? Post-enlightenment people that we are, we have largely lost the sense of gratitude for our food which you can still find so markedly in countries where food is often pretty scarce. Time and again, friends who have worked in countries of the Third World tell me of the way their neighbours there give thanks for the sometimes very limited amount of food they receive – and rejoice with unselfconscious generosity when they hear of others having plenty of food to eat.

So this Psalm invites us to recover that sense of gratitude to God for *food as gift*. There is a great wee book of graces published by the Wild Goose Publications of the Iona Community, called “Blessed Be Our Table”, which contains graces for meals and reflections on food, some humorous, some very challenging – we often use the one that goes: “*God bless to us our bread. Give bread to those who are hungry, and hunger for justice to those who are fed. God bless to us our bread.*” Linking a sense of gratitude to a yearning for justice seem only right in this context – and of course leaves hanging awkwardly in the air the question - “well, what are you going to do about it?” But – an important 'but' – gratitude needs to come first – else we could fall into the trap of the moralists, who think it is entirely up to them.

(A Cumbrian grace we got from one of our grand-daughters:

“Give us, O Lord, a bit of sun,  
A bit of rain and a bit of fun;  
Give us, in all the struggle and sputter,  
Our daily bread, and a bit of butter.”)



**Matthew 6: 19 – 34**

We recently had a plague of moths in our house. They had infested a carpeted store cupboard in the attic, where we kept clothes and linen that we seldom use. So we hadn't noticed it for ages – because we put all that stuff away up there and thought it was quite safe.

Moth and rust get to work in places and parts that are out of the way, unnoticed and often therefore uncared-for. In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is trying to get us to live what Eugene H. Petersen calls “A Life of God-Worship.” Petersen paraphrases part of verse 30 as

*“What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to be not so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving.”*

At a personal level, it's perhaps not too difficult to have a shot at practising this; “living simply so that others may simply live” is a much-mentioned mantra, and plenty of people try to do it, always remembering to put thankfulness before effort.

But – how to do it on a national, never mind an international, scale? One of the criticisms sometimes made of the Sermon on the Mount is that it feels too much like simply a personal ethic, behaviour that can be practised in the privacy of your own home, but completely impossible to translate into the political or economic sphere.

But the truth surely is that with the shrinking of the world into what we now have learnt to call 'The Global Village', we cannot hide behind that excuse any longer. My “worrying about what I will eat and what I will drink” can so easily become someone else's *lack of enough* either to eat or to drink – and I cannot any longer make ignorance my excuse.

So food sustainability, on a universal scale, is the task we are asked to undertake, if we are to live “a life of God-worship.” It is a task from God, because

- we believe that God, as Creator, provides food for all, and not just for some;
- we believe that God, as Redeemer, summons us to a life of gratitude, of sharing, and of hospitality;
- we believe that God, as Sustainer, enables us to act with courage and determination, even in the face of apathy and selfishness.



This will involve us in both charity and politics; in personal and in corporate action; in analysis as well as in prayer; and it will need patience every bit as much as enthusiasm.

And above all, it will need the burning conviction that it is NOT God's will that, because of greed and injustice, there are millions today who will NOT receive their daily bread.

A final thought, from Meister Eckhart, the medieval mystic:

“If the only prayer you ever said was 'thank-you',  
you would have said all the prayers. “

## Miriam and Mary

**A dialogue based on Exodus 16, by Ruth Burgess**

*Ideally this dialogue should be given to two people with enough time for them to become familiar with the style and timbre of the piece. They could stand at both sides of the chancel, or perhaps even one standing and one seated. The final line in bold is said by both in unison.*

Well Miriam

*Well Mary*

We did it, Miriam

*Yes, we did it Mary*

They said we'd never do it Miriam

*But we did do it Mary*

And we did it well Miriam

*We sure did Mary, we sure did.*

It took us ages, Miriam

*but we had ages Mary*

all that persuading Miriam

*all that collecting Mary*



all that writing down Miriam

*all those parchment pages ,Mary*

but we did it Miriam, *Yes we did it Mary.*

Do you remember how it started Miriam?

*I do Mary*

We'd told Moses that we were hungry, Miriam

*and he'd told God that we were hungry ,Mary*

And God sorted it Miriam

*God definitely sorted it Mary*

Quails for dinner Miriam

*and Manna for breakfast and lunch, Mary*

It took us a while to get used to it Miriam

*It sure did Mary*

Especially the Manna Miriam

*Especially the Manna Mary*

And if you gathered too much Manna Miriam

*It wasn't very nice Mary*

all those worms Miriam

*and the smell Mary.*

But the manna was good Miriam

*sweet as honey Mary*

and the quails tasted good Miriam

*very good Mary*





but after a week of quails and Manna Miriam  
*it got very boring Mary*  
and then Moses told us Miriam  
*it was quails and manna for forty years Mary!*

It was then we had our great idea Miriam  
*We sure did Mary*  
we called all the women together Miriam  
*every single one of them Mary*  
and we told them about our great idea Miriam  
*and they thought it was a grand idea Mary*  
and they all said they'd help Miriam  
*and they did Mary.*

They brought us their ideas Miriam  
*and such ideas Mary*  
some simple ideas Miriam  
*and some very complicated ones Mary*  
some brilliant ideas Miriam  
*and some crazy ideas Mary*  
and we wrote them all down Miriam  
*we sure did Mary*

There was Manna a la locust Miriam  
*and quail au vin Mary*  
there was manna roly-poly Miriam



*and quail low-fat haggis Mary*  
there was manna crumble Miriam  
*and stuffed quail pasties Mary*  
and we had to try them all out Miriam  
*it was hard hard work Mary.*

Well Miriam

*Well Mary*

We finally got it finished Miriam

*we did Mary*

and here it is Miriam

*it's beautiful Mary*

bound in a scroll Miriam

*it was worth the effort Mary.*

And we're going to ask Moses Miriam

*and Aaron too Mary*

if they'll put it with the jar of Manna Miriam

*in front of the covenant box Mary*

so that our descendants can read it Miriam

*the fruit of our labours Mary*

The Wilderness Cookery Book Miriam

*Our Wilderness Cookery Book Mary.*

**“The Wilderness Cookery Book by Miriam and Mary”**



## Prayer and Responses

### Collect

Almighty God,  
You have broken the tyranny of sin  
And sent into our hearts the Spirit of your Son.  
Give us grace  
To dedicate our freedom to your service,  
That all people may know  
The glorious liberty  
Of the children of God;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Who lives and reigns  
With you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and for ever.

### Grace for after a meal

for daily bread  
and tummies fed - thank you  
for on-going need  
and too much greed - forgive me  
in daily pause  
and with just cause - challenge me.  
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.

## Kingdom of God – Menu / Prayer Card

*[Set out like a restaurant menu, suggesting a menu of options for our lives and our churches, or copy and paste onto your order of service]*

Dear God, as I sit down to eat I pray...

### **For Starters**

that the time will come very soon,  
when all your children around the world,  
can sit down daily to a nourishing meal.

### **Main Course**

that preference is given for the politics of those hungry,  
priority is factored for the economics of fair-trade,  
and justice is served around the world's table.

### **Dessert**

thank you for my daily bread,  
in sharing may I experience true communion,  
and taste the sweetness of your kingdom come.

### **Gratuities**

out of my thankfulness,  
help me feed the hungry.  
and campaign with those thirsting for justice.



## Prayer of Confession

Generous God,  
you fill the earth to overflowing  
with food for all and to spare;  
we bless you for your generous providing,  
food to sustain us all our days.

Forgive us,  
that in our selfishness and greed  
we have thought so often  
only of our own table,  
and not of our neighbour's,  
and have hoarded to ourselves  
that which you intended for everyone.

Redeemer God,  
you visit the earth in Jesus  
and show us how to live  
a life of God-worship;  
we bless you for your redeeming love,  
trusting us to follow you  
in thankfulness, in sharing,  
and in hospitality.

Forgive us,  
that in our stuttering and stumbling  
we make excuses,



and limp along behind you, too often,  
unwilling to hold our neighbour's hand.

Sustainer God,

In the power of the Spirit  
you show us a vision  
of how things can be  
if only we would let you loose  
to re-order the world as you made it to be.

Forgive us,  
that in our cowardice and confusion  
we have turned inward  
and failed to see how we can  
work with you  
to make all things new.

God,

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,  
fill us with life anew;  
inspire us to lives of gratitude,  
and of hard, determined action,  
so that, in our own homes  
and in the world  
for which Jesus was content to die,  
there may be enough food for each,



and life abundant for all;  
 so that when He comes again, in His glory,  
 we will be welcomed into His joy  
 as those who, in feeding the hungry,  
 fed Him.  
 We pray in Jesus' name.  
 Amen.

## 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 Themes**

God bless to us our bread [*short*] **CH4 763**

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful [*short*] **CH4 772**

For your generous providing **CH4 655**

For everyone born **CH4 685**

Loving Creator **CH4 116**

For the fruits of all creation **CH4 231**

Pears and apples **CH4 232**

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah **CH4 167**

God the Father of Creation **CH4 113**

When the hungry who have nothing share with strangers **CH4 258**

Christ be our light **CH4 543**

When I needed a neighbour **CH4 544**

Abundant life (We cannot own the sunlit sky) **CG 2**

Look and learn from the birds in the air **CG 72**

There Is One Among Us: We will take what you offer [Wild Goose Resource Group](#)

We Walk His Way: We will be fed with finest wheat [Wild Goose Resource Group](#)



## Additional Resources

### The Gift of Food

**The Church of Scotland believes that caring for God's earth and all creation is a fundamental Christian responsibility. How we choose the food we eat is an important part of our duty to care for creation and we ask you to pray for guidance and act in the following ways:**

- T Tread lightly upon this earth
- H Harvest food with care for the earth
- E Eliminate waste from over-shopping and over-catering
  
- G Grow as much of my own food as I can
- I Increase the amount of locally grown food I buy
- F Fair Trade – support Fair Trade when buying exotic foods
- T Take time to Taste and enjoy all food I am offered or I make
  
- O Offer hospitality at my table
- F Find out the story of the food that I buy; where is it grown? What is my impact on the grower's life quality?
  
- F Fair prices and support for local farmers
- O Overseas food – how much do I need for a balanced diet?
- O Organic Food – what do I think about it?
- D Donate or share any surplus harvests I might have



## Further Material

A video on ‘Why should we care about climate change?’

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjwmrg\\_\\_ZVw](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>

Prayers, sermons and other ideas for Creation Time are available at:

- 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>

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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](mailto: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](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/speak_out/care_for_the_earth)

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

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

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