

starters for Sunday

Starters for Sunday, 23rd September

Creation Time Resources Day Four

The Sun, Stars and the Seasons

And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” ... And there was evening, and there was morning — the fourth day. ~ The Book of Genesis

[Genesis 1: 1-19](#)

[Ecclesiastes 3: 1 – 9](#)

[Psalm 148](#)

[John 15: 1 – 17](#)



Introduction to Theme

We have turned night into day by electric lighting, in our homes and in the street. We can live our lives in air conditioned offices or centrally heated houses and enjoy perpetual summer indoors even if it is dark, wet and cold outside. It is quite possible to live in a city and be almost unaware of the passage of day into night; and unless there is a catastrophic blizzard or storm or flood be almost unaware of nature.

As with food we have come to take travel very much for granted. It has become routine, mundane, and the 'journey to work' has become part of the daily grind. Travel by plane, a technological miracle of the twenty first century, has become as routine as getting on a bus.

Freedom to travel has transformed our lives. We are no longer constrained to stay in one place for our entire life; we have the

opportunity to see the world, see different places and meet different people, an enriching experience. Yet this freedom to travel has been bought at a high cost and the impact of transport on climate change is growing. In Scotland road traffic is responsible for over ten million tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year, the most important greenhouse gas by volume and the growth in long distance airline travel further adds to this total.

Should we accept some constraint on our freedom to travel or does the human right to freedom of movement mean we can go where we want, when we want, as quickly as we want? In our haste to provide continuous human comfort and opportunity will we lay waste those things that truly matter?



Introduction to Passages

For most of us in the rich northern part of the world, the passage of the seasons each year is usually an unremarkable event. Indeed, speaking personally, I love it! The regularity of it – the anticipated new growth in the Spring, the hope (!) of Summer, the snug feeling of the coming Autumn, the festivals of Winter – the rhythm of the seasons feels benevolent and right, and hardwired into my system. I suspect it is in the systems of most of us – up here.

Elsewhere, of course, it's a different story. In many parts of the world, the passage of the seasons – and sometimes the very absence of it - can be disastrous. Unseasonal floods; year after year without rain to water the crops; the fear and uncertainty all that can bring, never mind the disease and often death that can accompany it, make for a very different feeling as far as the seasons are concerned. And meanwhile, the nations of the world, meeting recently at the United Nations summit at Rio, fail to come up with anything really significant as far as dealing with climate change is concerned.

As for travel, that too is a matter of mixed blessings in our rapidly shrinking world. Again, it is we northerners who take it increasingly for granted, with air travel now such a common, and for lots of us such an enjoyable and even necessary, experience. Many of us are now increasingly aware of the dangers to the planet posed by the carbon emissions this produces; not so many of us know what can be done about it. And moving food around the world, again something we take for granted, and appreciate the variety it adds to our diets, nevertheless adds to the problem – we need to think about this as well.

The ease of travel for us up here poses another challenge. I remember the very strange feeling, many years ago, of leaving a Conference of European Churches event in northern Italy as people were just finishing their main course at the evening meal, and arriving back in Glasgow just a couple of hours later, by plane, and thinking “they will still be at their coffee!” It just didn't feel like “travelling”; especially when I contrasted it with a book I had been reading about the Renaissance scholar Erasmus, and a journey he'd made from Holland to Switzerland that took him a whole week, and brought him all sorts of rich and varied encounters on the way. Flying is great – and opens the world up to us in so many good ways – but what are we losing by not actually moving slowly across land and sea? In all the great religions of the world, travelling in a fundamentally human way, on foot, on land and sea, plays a significant part in producing deep insights about the human condition, and creates significant relationships along the way.

Here are a few passages from Scripture, to help us reflect on these matters.



Genesis 1: 1 - 19 – especially verses 14 – 19

Here, on “Day 4”, the makers of this great narrative offer us an insight into the sense of order that they believe God intends for His creation. Clearly, we are meant to live in an ordered world – day separated from night, years separated into days and seasons, light separated from darkness – all in good and regular order, as God intended.

This, as we have seen, is not the universal experience of humankind – and that, very largely, by choice. To be clear, I am not saying that the drought-trapped African family, or the flood-engulfed Bangladeshi peasant, in any way personally choose their fate. But scientific opinion comes down heavily on the side of the view that much of the climate chaos that is disordering creation is caused by human decisions, mainly made by us in the northern part of the world. We choose to dis-order the climate by our consumer-driven rush for growth. We choose to dis-order the climate by our frantic, speed-driven determination to pump damaging carbon into the atmosphere. We choose to demand more and more imported food, thus adding to the dis-order of the seasons. And we need to recognise, too, that we often choose a lifestyle which, for many, turns night into day and vice versa – and not always with benevolent results for individual and family life in society.

Is there an alternative? Neither easy slogans – “back to basics”, “we're all in this together” - nor luddite retreating offer any way forward. National governments and international agreements obviously have a part to play – and we need to keep on urging them to play it. But it seems to me that it is only as we look seriously at our own lifestyles, and begin to make serious and sustained choices about how we live, how we spend our money, how we travel, and so on, that a re-ordering can really begin to happen. For us in the church, the Eco-congregation movement (www.ecocongregationscotland.org) can be a start.



Ecclesiastes 3: 1 – 9

This famous passage is perhaps most often heard at funerals, where it can bring a sort of comfort to grieving families – although I have always found it to carry, as with much else in the same book, a rather uncomfortable sense of fatalism. As with the previous passage, though, it speaks of a very clear sense of the ordering of things, here with a very neat, and very Hebraic, coupling of opposites.

Perhaps this passage, and specifically the second part of verse 2 - “a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted” - can raise for us the specific issues of seasonal food transport, and the importance of using local produce?

Google “Food miles”, and you find scary statistics! UK food travels 30 billion kilometres annually, including all imported food, and is responsible for adding about 19 million tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere each year. Over 2 million tonnes of this comes simply from cars driving to and from the shops.

There is a [Food Miles Calculator](#) you can use, to check your own situation. In Fife, the [Fife Diet](#) Company is a local initiative, supported by the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund, which is becoming increasingly well-known as an organisation actually enabling people to grow and/or buy almost all they need locally, thus dramatically reducing the number of food miles they rack up.

Then there are of course the [Fair Trade](#) and [Tradecraft](#) movements – bodies working for a fairer trading arrangement for local producers all over the world. And increasingly, local shops and supermarket chains are stocking their products. More recently, I've heard of people refusing to accept all the wasteful and harmful packaging so much of our food is wrapped up in – taking it off at the check out, causing quite a stir!

The really important point here, of course, is that ignorance of what we are doing to our climate by the way so many of us buy our food is no longer an excuse. If we are serious about the ordering of the seasons, and about the way we are meant to live together in our small planet, then we can do something about it. Now!



Psalm 148

This summons to praise, sent out to the whole of creation, simply demands to be sung! No wonder there are two versions of it in Church Hymnary 4! (Hymns 104 and 105).

The picture that comes into my head every time I sing or read this Psalm is of a moving experience I had once, while camping on the Inner Hebridean Isle of Coll. The summer evening was quietly moving on. I was standing outside our tent, watching the sea. And as I looked, to my amazement, I saw the huge red sun setting and the great pale moon rising, at one and the same time. For a moment, I felt quite giddy – it was as if the planet was tumbling about, and I was about to fall. The experience stays with me, and reminds me of my tiny, yet at the same time also hugely responsible, place in the great scheme of things, under God.

John 15: 1 – 17

There are two great themes in this famous passage which seem to me to have a special bearing on our concern for sustainable energy.

The first is the theme of “abiding”. I like Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of verse 5: “I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant.” Building on his consistent theme of Jesus as the pre-existent Word of God, with God from the beginning of creation, what the Fourth Evangelist seems to be saying here is that the life and teaching of Jesus, and the power of the faith that God has brought to birth through his death and resurrection, are the touchstone for all sustainable energy – both the energy that sustains the very life of the earth, and the energy that sustains our individual lives.

That links in with the second theme here, the theme contained in verses 12 to 17, of loving one another as he has loved us, of laying down our lives for our friends, of bearing fruit.

How, in a word, are we to keep going – how do we keep on keeping on? Increasingly, in our society, the cult of instant gratification, and the unwillingness to stick at things – whether it be a marriage or a job or a long-term political commitment or whatever – poses a threat, does it not, to sustainability? We are always reminded that what God asks of us is not so much success as faithfulness. In the cause of caring for the planet and all that makes for its long-term sustainability, it is surely the energy of God that we need, mediated for us Christians through our faith in Jesus, to enable us to keep working away at all these demanding issues. And here is the promise - “those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.”



Please note, the materials above are designed to be a starting point for **what** you might preach this Sunday. If you would be interested in looking at our free materials on **how** you might preach, please click [here](#) to see our [Preachers Perspectives](#) web page where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Poems, Prayers and Responses

Collect

Almighty God,
You created the heavens and the earth,
And you made us in your image.
Teach us to discern your hand
In all your works
And to serve you
With reverence and thanksgiving;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who is alive and reigns
With you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever.



A Time To Weep by Margaret McLarty

(Written to be read between the Ecclesiastes and John readings)

Also, please see the video here on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNVBjbJb9vo>

For everything there is a season.

But I love strawberries.

And I want

sugarsnap peas

then blueberries

broad beans and nectarines

pears, pineapple, peaches, plums

plaice, parsnip, peas and prawns

pomegranate, peppers

pumpkin, pollack

and a partridge in a pear tree.

And, tell me, what would life be without a banana?

I want June in November.

I want August in March.

'Cause my appetite for apples can never be appeased

and by April I pine, for you, my darling clementine.

But now it's February in July.

And in the midwest the corn harvest is being threatened by drought;

held up by an earth turned Lone Ranger.

But I am only helping those who grow



by buying avocado from Mexico.

Organic AND fairtrade from Waitrose

...it is totally worth the extra cost!

(Plus the guacamole I made was perfect with my nachos!)

So, so what if it's not in season

I'm totally not the reason there are

floods in The Dales,

droughts in Sahel,

it's all on such an epic scale

we should be expecting repercussion like Jonah and the whale!

So rain, rain go to Spain,

pour on the strawberries I'll eat with Champaign

jettied over by an air-freight plane

to a shopping chain

with a tempting ad campaign

because these are not just strawberries.

The Be-attitudes - by John Polhill

Blessed are those who use low energy light bulbs

for theirs is the light of God's wisdom.

Blessed are those who travel by train

for their lives are on God's track.

Blessed are those who chose a car with low fuel

consumption

for they are in God's fast lane.

Blessed are those who insulate their homes

for theirs is the warmth of God's love.



Blessed are you when you put yourselves out
to use energy from renewable sources,
for you have kindled the flame of the future.

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.



Reconciling all things

Glory be to you O Christ, Saviour of the world.

To you all creatures bow in awe and praise and thanksgiving.

You reconcile all things on earth and heaven.

Your loving presence fills the whole universe.

Grant us power to grasp how wide and long

and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Glory be to you O Christ - Saviour of the world.

Teach us to use our civilisation's collective learning in your service.

You taught your disciples to live simply, yet joyfully together.

You formed their thinking through your stories and example.

Grant us power to use our intellects with wisdom

to cut our use of energy and live more simply,

and to share our technology and resources

in humility and love with all God's children.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Glory be to you O Christ - Saviour of the world.

As God's Word you were there at the beginning of space and time,

when energy pulsated through matter

when the sun's rays lightened the darkness

when the seas and rivers first flowed

and the winds rushed over the face of the oceans.

Grant us power to share and use this energy wisely.

Alleluia, alleluia!



From Operation Noah Launch, Coventry Cathedral, 2004

Prayer of Confession

God forgive us, for we knew not what we did.

We, the children of God, cry aloud to you, Lord our God.

Free us from sin and guilt to be truly your people.

Free us to praise you and live in your way forever.

God forgive us, for we knew not what we did.

Forests grew and died, and grew again, while under the Earth a treasure of fuel was laid.

Your people grew in skill and curiosity

and unearthed the secret carbon heritage of the forests.

We tamed fire in our engines to increase our comfort and mobility.

We have been tempted to take these benefits to ourselves,
to live a life where you could no longer find us.

God forgive us, for we knew not what we did.

Creator of all, the hymn of creation has become the cry of the world.

Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we hide ourselves in shame.

Yet, just as you came to them and asked them lovingly, 'Where are you?'

so you come to us today and lovingly ask us, 'Where are you?'

We are here Lord, seeing ourselves as the centre of your world,
and blind to the fact that you are the centre of all your creation.

God forgive us, for we knew not what we did.



We are here, Lord, destroying in a few years the mighty works of aeons,
so that we may be comfortable as we prepare catastrophe.

We are here Lord, exposing the poor to a fragile future,
threatening the livelihoods of our children,
and driving animals and plant life to extinction.

God forgive us, for we knew not what we did.

Now we know. Hear our cry for help to change our ways.

Creator of the mighty trees, the broad oceans,
the atmosphere, the earth, and all that lives,
forgive us and reconcile us to you.

Let us remake this world in the love and compassion of
the One who makes all things new,
who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

We, the children of God, cry aloud to you, Lord our God.

Restore, reconcile and re-equip us
to live in harmony with all creation,
and to be signs to each other and to the world
of your kingdom come on Earth.

**Written for the Operation Noah launch service, Coventry Cathedral 2004,
based on 'Creation Festival Liturgy' at Coventry Cathedral in 1988.**



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 any Day

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 Specific to Day Four

All you works of God

CH4 151

The Lord of heaven confess

CH4 104

Glory to God above

CH4 105

Sing to God with gladness

CH4 150

Sing for God's glory

CH4 172

I am the vine

Wild Goose Resource Group

Please note, these are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music magazine Different Voices. To subscribe click [here](#). To see more information and see our free taster copy click [here](#).



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>

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/creationtimeliturgyo8.pdf>

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Ruth Burgess, Margaret McLarty and Rev Malcolm Rooney and Rev John Harvey

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

Or 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>

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.

