

starters for Sunday

Resources for Creation Time Week 3 - 'Sharing Water, Sharing Life'

15 September 2013 17th Sunday after Pentecost



Material for Creation time has been produced by a group coordinated by Rev Trevor Jamison, Environmental Chaplain, Eco Congregation Scotland. Our thanks to Emma Barber, Joanne Evans-Boiten, Trevor Jamison, Adrian Shaw and Chris Wigglesworth.

Further materials can be found on the Eco Congregation Scotland website [here](#).

Contents

Introduction to Sharing Water, Sharing Life	2
Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28	5
Psalm 14	6
1 Timothy 1: 12-17	6
Luke 15: 1-10	7
Sermon Ideas	8
Prayers.....	9
Musical Suggestions	13
Additional Resources.....	14



Introduction to Sharing Water, Sharing Life

Eco-Congregation Scotland and the Church of Scotland have joined together to promote resources for worship for Creation Time 2013.

What is Creation time?

Creation Time started in the Orthodox Church in 1989 and has been supported by a growing number of churches across Europe since then. The European Christian Environmental Network has urged churches to adopt a Time for Creation stretching from 1 September to the feast of St Francis on 4 October. This was endorsed at the European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania in 2007, when it was agreed that Creation Time "be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change". It was adopted by the Church of Scotland at the General Assembly in 2011. You can find out more [here](#).

United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation

2013 is the United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation. This has been adopted as the theme for Creation Time 2013.

The objective of this International Year is to raise awareness about water cooperation, and about the challenges of water management around the world. This a huge challenge in a world of rapidly growing population, urban growth and climate change. You can find out more about the UN International Year of Water Cooperation [here](#).

Why is Water Sharing of Importance to Churches?

Water is essential to life and without water we could not live. The Bible repeatedly reminds us of the importance of caring for creation and water is part of this story. In the first verse of Genesis water exists before land and the seas are created on the third day. Water is part of the bounty of creation. In Leviticus 26:4 we hear that God 'will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.' In Psalm 72:6 'May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!'



Water can also be destructive and when it comes in floods devastation follows. (Genesis 7, 20-23) 'The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.' Water then has potential as both a blessing and a threat to human life.

Water Conflicts

Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan, a recognition of the spiritual significance of the river as well as its practical importance for life. Yet the same River Jordan today is a source of division and discord. According to Friends of the Earth, Middle East 'The Jordan River is unique in its natural and cultural wealth, but is threatened by excessive water diversion and pollution, treated as a backyard dumping ground'. The river is heavily used for human purposes and its flow is greatly reduced, and because of this and the high evaporation rate of the Dead Sea, the sea is shrinking. All the shallow waters of the southern end of the sea have been drained in modern times and are now salt flats. Disputes around the use of this river's water have involved communities, countries and peoples and remain a potent source of division. Sadly, disputes over water are not unique to the River Jordan. You can find out more [here](#).

Water as a Human Right

In 2010, through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation. The Resolution calls upon States and international organisations to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.

This ambition is far from realised according to the United Nations 2.5 billion people in the world do not have access to adequate sanitation, almost two fifths of the world's population. You can find out more [here](#).



For all these reasons, spiritual and practical, water co-operation and water sharing is a theme of global importance. We invite you to reflect on the lectionary bible messages, with attention to the opportunities and challenges provided by this perspective, and also to use the worship material and accompanying links to further information and resources.



Readings

[Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28](#)

The passage opens with a declaration of judgment, a theme that recurs in the succeeding verses. In verses 11 and 12 this is described in terms of a hot wind, sweeping down upon Jerusalem and its people, a wind stronger than that needed simply for winnowing or cleansing.

Verses omitted from this reading contain a call to change wicked ways which have dire political consequences; the fall of Jerusalem to an invading (Babylonian) army. From verse 23 onwards, however the outcome is described in almost cosmic terms, with the earth left waste and void and the heavens having no light. Also, the landscape and environment do not escape an ecological destruction where birds have taken flight and disappeared (v. 25) and previously fruitful land has been transformed into a desert (v.26). Even without an army to storm their walls such loss of agricultural hinterland would leave ancient cities in ruins (v. 25).

The root causes of this situation are identified as human foolishness, with the people described as stupid children, lacking understanding of the consequences of their actions; ignorant of how to do good yet capable of doing evil (v.22). In the midst of desolate land there is the smallest hint of hope that not all will be destroyed (v.27) but this is not to be taken as evidence that judgment can be avoided (v.28).

What then, in our time, are the actions grounded in ignorance, foolishness, or evil intent that might result in such dire political, environmental consequences that could threaten our continued existence? And can we look to God with hope if we are not willing to change our ways?



[Psalm 14](#)

The psalm continues to grapple with the themes of wrong actions, related to human foolishness and ignorance. It is the 'fool' who says there is no God and takes this as licence to do evil, and psalmist is pessimistic that any other attitude is to be found in humankind (v.1).

Wisdom is associated with seeking God, and so doing that which is right (v.2), in contrast to the lack of knowledge amongst evildoers (v.4). Indeed, this contrast is the one with which the Book of Psalms commences.

The poor are seen as the victims of wrongdoers and a warning issued that they find their refuge with God, in contrast to those who mistreat them (v.6).

The psalm concludes with a plaintive wish Zion would be the source of deliverance when God restores his people (v. 7), prompting questions about whether today's Church can find inspiration in that vision to be a source of wisdom in a world where wrongdoing exists.

[1 Timothy 1: 12-17](#)

The themes of judgment and foolish ignorance found in the passages from Jeremiah and the Psalms continue in the epistle reading, for once again ignorance plays its part in wrongdoing. A swift rehearsal of the Apostle Paul's early career as a 'blasphemer, persecutor and man of violence' is paired with the good news that he received mercy from God because he 'acted ignorantly in unbelief.' (v. 13)

There is no claim that Paul was innocent, as the psalmist would have known (14: 3), but despite his guilt he received 'mercy', a word that recurs, along with grace, in succeeding verses.

That God showed mercy to the worst of sinners (v. 15) is a profoundly hopeful example to those seeking eternal life (v.16). God's patience, displayed in Christ, leads to a merciful judgment, which evokes a response of praise (v.17) which concludes this passage.



[Luke 15: 1-10](#)

This passage forms part of a chapter consisting of three parables. In the first, one sheep among one hundred is lost, in the second, one coin among ten, in the third, one son out of two is lost, having wandered off to a distant country. Thus, in approaching the first two parables it is challenge to look at them without the third intruding.

The first verse of the chapter reveals that Jesus has two audiences. Tax collectors and sinners form one group, coming to listen to him. Pharisees and scribes form the second group, critical of Jesus for his welcome to the first group. Their attitude is given as the reason for Jesus sharing the parables which follow.

Both parables feature searching and discovery which are the cause for rejoicing, in which others are invited to join. Both parables feature Jesus' comment that a single sinner's change of direction produces great joy in heaven. In the first parable, though not in the second, this is compared the lesser amount of heavenly joy over (ninety-nine) righteous ones who don't need to repent.

In both parables the searcher seems to represent God. The image of a shepherd used of God was a traditional one, familiar to Jesus and his audience(s), from appearing in the Old Testament (Psalm 23: 1 being the best known example). The portrayal of the God of Israel as a woman, however, was an unusual, radical choice.

Obviously tax collectors and sinners will have received the parables in a very different way to (righteous) Pharisees and scribes. Today's readers are challenged to consider how their own settings and perspectives influence the ways in which they hear these parables of Jesus as 'good news' (or not).



Sermon Ideas

Our decisions have consequences, including ones that we do not expect. Everyone now knows that any amount of smoking tobacco is bad for your health. Some take refuge in the notion that ‘a glass of red wine a day is good for your heart’, but carefully ignore the impact of alcohol on other bodily organs, such as the liver. Many know deep down that deep-fried food is an unwise choice but ‘just cannot stop themselves.’

All of the above affect the health of individuals but they also have wider consequences. These include the social impact of alcohol-fuelled violence, the economic cost to the NHS of treating those who ‘over indulge’, and the political consequences for governments dealing with the problems but dependant on the tax revenue.

Those that worship different gods (Jeremiah 4) or ignore God (Psalm 14) might expect the political consequences that ensue – invasion and exile; the ecological consequences - a desert landscape bereft of bird life - was probably unexpected.

There is a combination of knowledge and ignorance about the environmental impact of the choices we make concerning our food and drink, in terms of land use, carbon footprint, embodied water and climate change. You can out more [here](#). Even if we are ignorant, however, as the saying goes, ‘ignorance is no excuse under the law’, for our choices still have their impact, no matter what the case.

What is needed is a turnaround, or change of direction, (‘repentance’) in decisions we make that have malign impact upon God’s creation. God is gracious and merciful to those who are ignorant or don’t always do what they know they should, as the career of Saint Paul illustrates (1 Timothy 1: 12-17). This is a cause for rejoicing and renewed effort, not an excuse to ‘rest on our laurels’.

So, even small changes and actions, carried out by small numbers of people, such as churches, are moves in the right direction, and a cause for heavenly rejoicing. Who knows, their wider impact for good may be even greater than we envisage.



Prayers

Prayer of praise and adoration

We praise you, O God!

You are the creating God.

Through your power and love we live in a world full good things

Sunshine and shower

Mountain and lake

River and ocean

This we enjoy and this we would share with others.

We praise you, O God!

You are the just God.

Heard though the voice of your prophets,

Known in the work of faithful leaders.

You care for the vulnerable,

And you hold the powerful to account.

This we experience and this we would share with others.

We praise you, O God!

You are the searching God.

When we wander off in the wrong direction

You are the shepherd who brings us home.

When we are lose ourselves in life's bad places

You are the woman who brings us back to the light.



And when this world had gone astray,
Just at the right time, you came to us in your Son, Jesus.
This we believe and this we would share with others.

God of creation, God of justice, searching God,
We praise you and bring you our worship today.

Prayer of confession

Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” (Psalm 14: 1)

O God, we confess that there is a wide gap between what we say with our lips and what we believe in our hearts

With our lips we say ‘the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it’

In our hearts we believe and act as though the world belongs to us, to do with as we will

Forgive us our foolishness, Lord

With our lips we say ‘Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is saviour’

In our hearts we want all things arranged to suit our views and tastes, and are ready to fight our corner

Forgive us our foolishness, Lord

With our lips we say ‘be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ’

In our hearts we demand others submit to us – families, friends and neighbours

Forgive us our foolishness, Lord

Silence



Know this in your heart and proclaim it with your lips

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost. (1 Timothy 2: 15)

We are forgiven.

Amen

(Quoting Psalm 24:1; Ephesians 5: 22; Ephesians 5: 21)

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Generous God,

We thank you that we live in land that enjoys good government and stability.

Hear us, as we pray for lands suffering under oppressive, violent government.

Today, particularly, we pray for ...

Generous God,

We thank you that we live in land where water is plentiful and clean.

Hear us, as we pray for lands where people must search out water, clean or otherwise

Today, particularly, we pray for ...

Generous God,

We thank you for your Church and for our life together.

Hear us, as we pray for renewal in faith and for the strength to share our story with others
through words and actions

Today, particularly, we pray for ...



Generous God,

We thank you for those who help the church to see the world around us

Hear us, as we pray for organisations which are concerned with the health and well-being of your creation.

Today, particularly, we pray for the work of [A Rocha](#), Eco Congregation Scotland and ...

Generous God, we thank you for the good changes that have taken place in our lives.

Hear us, as we pray for a continued openness to your intention for our lives.

Today, particularly, we pray for a developing and deepening love for the whole of your creation.

We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus, the one who sought us out and brought us home.

Amen



Musical Suggestions

These touch upon themes of creation, including some with explicit references to water

CH4 28	Thy mercy Lord (Psalm 36)
CH4 136	God's will for creation
CH4 140	Lord, your hands have formed this world
CH4 147	All creatures of our God and king
CH4 151	All you works of God
CH4 238	Lord, bring the day to pass
CH4 240	God in such love for us lent us this plant
CH4 243	Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently
CH4 244	Where are the voices for the earth?
CH4 245	It's a world of sunshine, a world of rain
CH4 250	Sent by the Lord am I
CH4 525	Have you heard the raindrops drumming on the rooftops?
CH4 540	I heard the voice of Jesus say
CH4 722	Spirit of God, come dwell within me

15 September

CH4 1	How blest are those who do not stray (Psalm 1)
CH4 6	God shall endure for aye (Psalm 9)
CH4 14, 15, 16, 17	The Lord's my shepherd (Psalm 23)
CH4 187	There's a wideness in God's mercy
CH4 264	Judge eternal, throned in splendour
CH4 462	The King of Love my shepherd is
CH4 595	O breath of life come sweeping through us
CH4 669	O thou, who at thy eucharist didst pray



Additional Resources

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in Prayers. You may also be interested in looking at our publication **Pray Now 2013**. Please click [here](#).



Music Resources



The hymns mentioned in this material 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](#) and can be found [here](#).

Preaching Resources



Starters for Sunday materials 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.

Scots Worship Resources

The Church's Scots Language in Worship Group produces a [wide range of worship resources](#) in Scots language, which include reflections, poems, prayers, songs and drama.



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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.

