

starters for Sunday

Resources for Creation Time Week 1: 'Sharing Water, Sharing Life: Worship'

1 September 2013 15th 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 2: 4-13	5
Psalm 81: 1, 10-16	6
Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16	6
Luke 14: 1, 7-14	7
Sermon Ideas	8
Prayers	9
Music Suggestions	12
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 co-operation, 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 recognised 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 2: 4-13](#)

Is it a case of divine sarcasm or a genuine question which inquires what failings in God might lead a people to turn to alternative sources for help and power? (v.5) The opening verse declares that this is a question for the ‘all the families of the house of Israel’, but it seems as relevant for a contemporary and wider audience.

Firstly, the people are reminded of the good things God has done for them and given to them. In Jeremiah’s setting this includes freedom gained from slavery in Egypt and guidance through a wilderness where water is notably absent and life cannot be sustained.

Then, when a fruitful land is given, the people, presumably fearful of losing what they have been given, turn from the Giver to fertility gods. Widespread ‘common sense’ understands these gods to be the means to continued safety and prosperity. Even those in positions of power (rulers) and those informed about the true reality (priests and prophets) collude with this approach (v. 8). Such actions have cross-generational impact (v.9) for a people who decline to draw lessons, which are easily available to them if only they would take a wider, international perspective (vv.10-11).

Instead of rising to the challenge of making heaven a reality here on earth, the people settle for reducing the divine down to the level of their earthly efforts. As the prophet puts it, drawing upon images of water, essential element in life and growth, both for land and people, they would rather rely on the cracked cisterns they construct than upon God, the ‘fountain of living water.’



[Psalm 81: 1, 10-16](#)

Following the opening call to ‘sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob’, the psalmist then goes on to ponder the negative response from the people. They refuse to listen, to submit to God, not simply through failure to worship but through a wider refusal to ‘walk in my [God’s] ways.’ (v. 13) In other words, human lifestyle choices do not reflect God’s intentions for the people, a concern Jeremiah shares with the Psalmist.

There is a strong hint that such choices have negative repercussions for a people, taking them into a place of vulnerability to hostile or harmful forces. (vv.14-15) Yet God’s intention is not that people should suffer, but that they should enjoy the good things of life, available to them through creation, symbolised here by finest wheat and honey. (v. 16)

[Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16](#)

At this point in the letter the Christian congregation is exhorted to live a life characterised by mutual love and care for the other; what the psalmist would have called ‘walking in God’s ways.’ Care for the other includes remembering those in prison, a vulnerable group, not unlike those who find a place at the table when hosts follow the teaching of Jesus (Luke 14: 13).

Questions of welcome, hospitality and eating appear in the second verse, where the reminder that some have entertained angels without knowing it reminds us of Abraham’s welcome and offer of food to three strangers (Genesis 18) who turn out to be God’s messengers; a means by which God speaks.

As noted above, Psalm 81 begins with a call to worship and moves to consider questions of appropriate lifestyle. Here, in Hebrews, we begin with calls to a godly lifestyle which then is identified as a ‘sacrifice of praise’ which is ‘pleasing to God.’ (vv.15-16)



[Luke 14: 1, 7-14](#)

Verse one sets the immediate scene for the rest of the reading; Jesus, a dinner guest at the house of a leading Pharisee, is being closely watched for what he might say or do.

Previously (Luke 13: 27-28), Jesus has spoken of the kingdom or reign of God in terms of a worldwide banquet in which assumptions about the 'natural order of things' are overthrown. Now, Jesus begins with an observation about the striving for position at a banquet, held in a society underpinned by strong notions about hierarchy and honour (14: 7-10). Guests (who do not set the rules for the feast) are wise not to elbow others aside in the race for positions of prestige, lest they be exposed to ridicule. Humility, not pride, brings reward, as summed up in Jesus' saying in v.11.

In verses 12-14 the perspective changes from that of the guest to that of the host, and Jesus throws out a challenge to those who hold power in a context where potentially scarce food and drink are shared in a celebration. Jesus invites his hearers and readers to turn social norms upside down. Instead of inviting those who might be able to repay the compliment, hosts are told to bring in 'the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind', who normally have no place at the table, and no means with which to respond.

Hosts who behave in this way do so without expectation of 'return' in today's world but, says Jesus, can look forward to a place (of honour) at the worldwide banquet that symbolises God's kingdom come on earth.



Sermon Ideas

On the first of four Sundays where we pay attention to Creation Time, and on this Sunday where we focus on sharing water, a precious, commodity, vital for life, it is notable that all four readings feature aspects of eating and drinking; from the cracked cisterns of Jeremiah to the promise of finest wheat and honey in the psalm, from the entertaining of angels in Hebrews (echoing the meal set before strangers in Genesis 18) to Jesus' sharp observations on table manners and hosting banquets.

Preachers might wish to start with examples of the good things we enjoy in our land, including, in Scotland, access to plentiful, clean water. Jeremiah reminds us that this comes as a gift from God, who is worthy of our praise and loyalty and we should be wary of placing total trust in contemporary human wisdom and leaders to negotiate the world's uncertainties.

Jesus reminds us that the hierarchy of human values can be diametrically opposed to those of God. Sometimes, as guests at the feast we are caught up in the 'rules of the game' and are forced to play within them, but as hosts, we take opportunities to exhibit God's priorities, which 'privilege' vulnerable people.

So, what does that faith perspective say to one of the situations about conflicts over water, provided in the Creation Time resources? You can out find more [here](#).

How do we, a Christian Church congregation respond? Our worship should involve praise for God for what we receive through the land, as in the call that begins Psalm 81. Inescapably, we are called to other practical actions. You can find out more [here](#).

In our worship we anticipate the great banquet of which Jesus spoke, where all are welcome, particularly the vulnerable. Through other actions we seek to put God's priorities into action here on earth, including in how we use and share water. Worship and other actions are a pleasing 'sacrifice of praise' to God, source of land, food, water and other good things we enjoy today.



Prayers

Prayer of Approach

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob. (Psalm 81: 1)

We sing aloud, O God, as we meet to worship you today.

We sing aloud, O God, Creator, who showers good things upon us.

We sing aloud, O God, Jesus Christ, through whom we receive a place at the table.

We sing aloud, O God, inspired and strengthened by your Holy Spirit.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

We praise you, O God, for in your generosity you give us life and an honoured place within your creation.

We praise you, O God, for in your Son, Jesus, you have stepped into your world, to lift up those who are cast down and to bring down those who look down on others.

We praise you, O God, that through your ever-present Holy Spirit you encourage us and cajole us into a joyful sharing of this space with all your creatures.

Yet we confess times we have been reluctant or unwilling to share the good things of this world.

Too often we put our concerns ahead of others, no matter what the cost to them.

Too seldom do we show hospitality to those dismissed by this world as small, unimportant or weak.

So, forgive us, we pray, for these and our other failings.

Silence

And as we experience the good news of your forgiveness, inspire us to deep, committed, neighbourly love, as we seek to love and glorify you.

Amen



Prayers of Intercession

God, who offers a feast at which all can be honoured guests, hear our prayers for your world and for all those you would invite to the table.

We pray for all who are called to positions of honour and those who yearn for such positions of honour. Just as Jesus spoke of those jockeying for position at the feast and then turned upside down the expectations of the world, may we learn from Jesus what it means to be humble in the company of others.

Generous God

Hear our prayer

We pray for those who find themselves in competition at the table of the world's resources. Today we pray particularly for those who compete with others for scarce supplies of water, from the Colorado to the Jordan, from Southern Africa to South Asia. May need for water cease to be a cause for conflict in your world.

Generous God

Hear our prayer

We pray for your Church in today's world. May this congregation and all others grow into being communities of hospitality. Just as Abraham once welcomed strangers may we also welcome others into fellowship, and in the process discover you in our midst.

Generous God

Hear our prayer

We pray for all occasions on which churches share food and drink. Especially, we pray for church-inspired community cafes and church-run food banks in our nation. May they meet the needs of those who use them and also speak a message of your hospitable loving generosity to humankind.

Generous God

Hear our prayer

And in the quietness hear us as we bring you our individual hopes and concerns, seeking your wisdom, your love, your support, your strength.

Silence

Generous God

Hear our prayer

Amen



Music Suggestions

Hymns touching upon theme 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
CH4 170	Praise and thanksgiving let everyone bring
CH4 255	Father, hear the prayer we offer
CH4 490	Jesus, lover of my soul
CH4 655	For your generous providing
CH4 671	You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat
CH4 738	Glorious things of thee are spoken



Additional Song - Permission received for use as long as the information given below is included when using the hymn

Source: [Songs of Grace: new hymns for God and neighbor #9](#)
 Author: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2007)
 Meter: 7.6.7.6 D – Suggested tune: Passion Chorale
 Copyright: Copyright © 2007 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved

We love to sound your praises

We love to sound your praises, To lift our hands above,

To sing how grace amazes, To celebrate your love.

Yet, God, your world is grieving; Is your heart breaking, too?

May we cry out, believing Laments can honour you.

Like Jeremiah, crying For cities that were lost,

We see the children dying Who know war's awful cost.

Each day repeats the story; Sin takes its toll again.

How can we sing your glory When our hearts break with them?

The scope of sin is broader Than what the late news tells;

Rejecting living water, We dig our broken wells.

In gods of our own making We look for joy each day;

O God, is your heart breaking When we all turn away?

O God, you came to save us In Christ, your suffering Son.

In his death you forgave us; In his life, joy is won!

And when this world is suffering, When songs of grief abound,

May we work for your kingdom, Till alleluias sound!



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.



The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to Eco-Congregation Scotland who have supplied these materials.

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.

