

Eco-Congregation Scotland

Creation Time Resources 2017: Journeying with God



INTRODUCTION

Worship material for Creation Time 2017 comes from an ecumenical writing group, with contributors from the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, The Salvation Army and Scottish Episcopal Church. It follows the theme “Journeying with God”, linking to the UN international year of sustainable tourism for development. It explores God’s invitation to join us in the journey of faith leading us into care for all creation.

Readings from the Gospel of Matthew are emphasised, which appear in the Revised Common Lectionary in September.

THE MATERIAL

Week One	03/09/17	Pilgrimage: God’s invitation to get moving (Matthew 16: 21-28)
Week Two	10/09/17	Guide for the journey: God’s commandments (Matthew 18: 15-20)
Week Three	17/09/17	God’s companionship on the journey (Matthew 18: 21-35)
Week Four	24/09/17	Food for the journey: God’s provision (Matthew 20: 1-16)

THE WRITING GROUP

Members of the Creation Time 2017 Writing Group:

Jenny Adams is Church of Scotland minister of Duffus, Spynie & Hopeman Parish, in Moray, in the north-east of Scotland. As part of an Eco-congregation, and through many other connections, she is trying, failing, and keeping trying to live out creation care and concern for social justice in all of life.

Basil Clark is the Parish Priest of Our Lady of Loretto and St Michael Catholic Church, in Musselburgh, East Lothian, a new Eco-congregation. As a former Anglican Franciscan and one time director of the Rock Trust he has an ongoing interest in justice, peace and environmental issues.

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Richard Murray is a Lay Reader in the Scottish Episcopal Church and a member of its Church in Society Committee, where he has a focus on environmental issues. He is a board member of Eco-Congregation Scotland.

Callum and Emma Newton are lieutenants in the Stornoway corps of the Salvation Army. The sheer beauty of the island on which they live make them appreciate and strive harder to do all they can to appreciate and protect God's creation. They are the first Salvation Army corps to become an eco-congregation.

Editor: Miriam McHardy is a freelance writer and editor, with a particular interest in the area of faith, justice and the environment. As part of a relatively new eco-congregation she is particularly interested in exploring how faith and spirituality can support our care for our planet.

ABOUT 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".

ALSO AVAILABLE

Resources for World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation - September 1st 2017

In 2015 Pope Francis established September 1st as the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, encouraging the Catholic community around the world to pray for our common home. Now, for its third year, the aid agency, CAFOD, provides a prayer in union with creation at:

<http://cafod.org.uk/content/download/25371/182321/version/5/file/A%20Christian%20prayer%20in%20union%20with%20creation-%20Laudato%20Si!.pdf>

And resources for organising a prayer vigil at:

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<http://cafod.org.uk/content/download/29948/340910/version/7/file/Prayer%20vigil%20for%20the%20care%20of%20creation.pdf>

The Columban Missionaries also offer a range of resources at:

<http://www.columbans.co.uk/creation-time/>

CREATION TIME 2017 - WEEK 1 - SEPTEMBER 3RD

“PILGRIMAGE: GOD’S INVITATION TO GET MOVING”

THOUGHTS ON THE READINGS

EXODUS 3:1-15

Here we find the first part of an encounter with God that starts Moses and the Hebrew people on a new journey. It comes at a pivotal moment where circumstances (the death of a king), and ongoing suffering, combine with God’s remembrance to start something new. It uses someone uniquely placed to engage with the Egyptian and Hebrew people, thanks to the courage of the women in his life. It begins with suffering, alienation, wilderness, and Moses’ ordinary work, into all of which God calls.

Moses is called by name by God, from the bush that is burning but not destroyed, on ground that becomes holy. God initially identifies God’s self in relation to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the liberation of God’s people in relation to the covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants. Throughout the ensuing dialogue, questions of identity are central. Moses is a Hebrew brought up as an Egyptian prince, but is now an alien residing in a foreign

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land (2:22). His first response to God's call is to say "Here I am," then his next words are "Who am I...?" In the first of many objections (in this passage and beyond), Moses cannot see how he can do what God asks of him. The next question raised is about God's identity – who are you? What shall I say about the one who calls? God then offers that most mysterious of answers, translated as: "I am who I am," or "I am what I am," or "I will be what I will be" (NRSV). God is "I am," and also "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Much has been written about the divine name, YHWH (from the Hebrew). It is a reminder that God cannot be known fully, we can't pin God down as we might want to. God is free to be Godself, thus free to act as God chooses. But God's identity is still relational – an "I" implies a relation to "you," and God is already in relationship with Moses' ancestors. There is also a promise going forward, that the God who made the covenant with Abraham is keeping that now, and "will be" into the future – with a future sign of worship on the mountain offered to assure Moses. God is mystery, but God is also faithful and in an ongoing relationship with people. This encounter marks a new stage in that engagement.

PSALM 105:1-6, 23-26,45C

This Psalm begins with a strong summons to a congregation to praise their faithful God. It then narrates the salvation history of the Israelite people, from God's covenant with Abraham through to the occupation of land, to reaffirm why God is worthy of their worship. The shared recitation and remembering of story and journey builds up a gathered people as a community, particularly as people gathered in, and by, the presence of God.

The opening 6 verses are a series of imperatives, instructing or commanding people to give thanks; call on God's name; make God's deeds known; sing praises to God; remember and tell of God's wonderful works; glory in God's holy name; rejoice; seek the Lord and God's presence. The repetition of exhortation emphasises its importance – the people are to do all these things, focusing on God.

Identity, so key in today's Exodus passage, crops up again here. The people are identified in verse 6 as "offspring of God's servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen one" (NRSV). That gives the congregation a particular place in the narrative that is being retold. God is identified as YHWH, the Lord, who shapes the story from the Abrahamic covenant onwards. God's name, which encompasses that identity and faithful character of God, is called upon.

Today's reading touches only on the Egypt section of the narrative. The way that it is told emphasises God's sovereignty and control over all that happened, including a belief that God

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hardened the hearts of the people of Egypt. That applies throughout the Psalm, God is the object, it is always God who is acting. The story is of the deeds of God, whom the congregation are to worship. Thus the Psalm finishes, as it began, with Hallelujah - praise the Lord!

ROMANS 12:9-21

From chapter 12 onwards, Paul's letter to the Romans builds on all that he has proclaimed about God's mercy and salvation to exhort the Christian community to live appropriately (12:1 "therefore" grounds this whole section). Such exhortation is listed in 12:8 as one of the gifts given through God's grace to the church community. The flow, from gifts given to the love which must shape their use, echoes 1 Corinthians 12 into 13.

Within Romans 12, verses 9-21 all relate to the practicalities of love, within the church community (one another, the saints) and beyond it to society and enemies (strangers, those who persecute you). It addresses broader love (agape), familial concern (philadelphia), and hospitality – expressed as love, affection, honour, hospitality, harmony, association, peace. Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet "*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways*" Paul reminds us that there are many ways to love.

The injunctions themselves include quotations from the Hebrew Bible, including Proverbs and Deuteronomy; references to Jesus' teachings; and what may have been well-known Christian sayings. An interesting textual variation is at v11, where most manuscripts conclude with "serve the Lord," but some have "serve the opportune time" (with Greek *kurio* for Lord being replaced with *kairo* for opportunity/time). With the very concrete love being advocated by Paul, the two readings may not be very different, and the idea of seizing the opportune moment (kairos) echoes aspects of the gospel reading and Exodus passage for today.

The discussion of vengeance and God's wrath may not be very comfortable reading, but its clear thrust is to hand a desire for revenge over to God. Instead, the section on engaging with those who wish harm on us or on the church community concludes with the summary that we should overcome evil with good. That challenging instruction also includes the hope that such overcoming is possible, as the gospel message spelled out in this letter has already made clear.



MATTHEW 16:21-28

In Matthew's gospel this section is framed as a new phase in Jesus' teaching of his disciples. "From that time on..." the necessity of the journey to Jerusalem, and Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, was shown to them. Such necessity, for Matthew, comes from the will of God. Therefore when Peter opposes it, and in fact tries to impose an alternative will on God - "God forbid it" - Peter is labelled Satan, the deceiver and tempter.

Peter's response, presumably shared by the other disciples, is understandable. In the preceding verses Matthew shares Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." The Messiah was not expected to suffer or die: Peter illustrates Paul's assertion that Christ crucified was a stumbling-block to Jews (1 Cor. 1:23). Peter also shares the natural human reaction to retreat from pain, especially for those we love. For his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus had to reject the stumbling block of Peter's instinctive reaction, as he had rejected much earlier temptations to take an easier way (Matthew 4:10).

Jesus' renewed emphasis on showing his disciples the way ahead is much needed. The disciples are with Jesus, but they are still trying to fit his life and teaching into their existing worldview, and they are making bold claims on behalf of God despite their lack of understanding. Here is a model of fallibility, highlighting the need for humility and vulnerability amongst believers. They/we need to learn from Jesus, in all the ways he shows God's will through word and embodied action.

That attitude of humility, and unconditional openness to God, is part of what Jesus describes in the paradoxical way of discipleship. There is a need to disown oneself and to be willing to face whatever sacrifice and opposition comes as a consequence of following Jesus' way. Life and self will be found in the paradox of leaving behind whatever seems to give us security.

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SERMON THOUGHTS

TIME/OPPORTUNITY

Within the theme of “Pilgrimage” these readings point towards timing. There is a right time, an opportune time, to begin a journey or a new stage on a journey. This is found in Jesus preparing his disciples for Jerusalem, in God’s call to Moses, throughout the salvation history retold in Psalm 105, and may be implied in the Romans passage.

This can be expressed in the Greek *kairos*, a concept which has been used to acknowledge a time for major change in apartheid South Africa in 1985, and in Palestine in 2009: a moment of truth and a time to hear the cries of suffering people. That same sense of urgency, faced with the immediacy of suffering and the imperative to change, is very applicable to care for creation, particularly around climate change. The next 5-10 years are crucial if global overheating is going to be limited to anything close to 2°C and some of the most catastrophic consequences for people and planet reduced. The current global political situation must also be acknowledged, with near universal engagement with the Paris agreement, but a need for words to become action and the challenge of the USA government’s disengagement. The time for climate action is now.

For the mathematically inclined that opportune time can also be expressed in the change equation:

$$D \times V \times F > R$$

which highlights that for change to take place

(D) Dissatisfaction with the current state of things;

(V) a Vision of a better possibility for the future;

and (F) concrete simple First steps;

must all be present and enough to overcome (R) Resistance to change.

In the gospel message, in the love of a faithful God, and in the example and teachings of Moses, Paul and ultimately Jesus, we are offered vision and steps to take. If we look honestly and with humility at ourselves and the world around us, acknowledging the damage being done to creation and hearing the cries of suffering people, we should be dissatisfied. Thus we can find ourselves at a time where things must change; a time to commit to a new direction on our journey, alongside others trying to live out God’s love for all.

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IDENTITY

Another theme that resonates throughout these passages is that of identity. There are important questions to be asked of ourselves, of our presumptions (as for Peter), of our inadequacies for the tasks that face us (Moses), of our relationships with others (Romans). These questions apply to us as individuals, and as communities gathering in God's name and thus connected to sisters and brothers around this fragile earth. Who we are, and how we understand ourselves, should shape how we live in relation to others, which must include how we care for the creation on which we all rely.

The other identity for discussion is that of God, though as Moses and Peter remind us, pinning God down to our expectations is not possible. These passages remind us of a God at work in lives at individual, communal and political levels; a God who is faithful; a God of grace and mercy; a God of love. If this is the God we worship and follow, then that gives us hope for our journey, hope for creation, and hope that we can be transformed, and so change the world.

ALL-AGE ADDRESS

Stumbling blocks:

With the example of a maze, or a Super Mario game, or board games – sometimes the way ahead looks easy, we can just keep going as things are, except suddenly we hit an obstacle that gets in our way.

Jesus' friend Peter thought they could carry on with Jesus healing and teaching people, using his power to dazzle folk and change things, so eventually Jesus would become a new king. That would make everything better for everyone. But Jesus had to tell Peter and his friends that it wasn't that simple – that the way for him to show God's love was much more complicated, and would involve him suffering and dying. In fact, Jesus also said that Peter was being an obstacle to him, because he was trying to keep Jesus safe on the easy path.

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Timing matters:

Take a well-known story all ages would know – it could be Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection; or it could be Little Red Riding Hood or another children’s story that has a clear beginning, middle and end.

Create an abbreviated telling of the story, in short sections. Read (or have read) the sections of the story, with the order mixed up. Does the story make sense? Did we read the right bits at the right time? Get help to re-order the story, to make sense.

When things happen is important. Some things have to happen after other things (e.g. the wolf can’t eat Grandma if the wolf is already dead; Jesus can’t be born after the resurrection). We need to get our timing right, whether reading parts of a story, or doing things in the world.

Jesus knew that too. Jesus knew that he had lots of things to do – to show God’s love in the world, to help his disciples understand God’s love – when he was living and working around Galilee. But he also knew that the right time was coming to go to Jerusalem, where he was going to face terrible struggles and be killed. So he tried to prepare his disciples, so they would also understand that, and so they could all journey together to Jerusalem. They didn’t really understand – they weren’t quite ready – but Jesus kept leading them, so they would eventually look back and see the whole story of God’s love in Jesus’ life and death and resurrection.

(Or Moses – right person, right place, right time.)

For each of us, are there things we need to do right now, because this is the right time? For example, change our lifestyles or make different choices to help reduce climate change, and care for our world and God’s creation.

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MUSICAL SUGGESTIONS

Hymn Books used

Church Hymnary 4 (CH4)	Hymns Old and New (HON)
The Song Book of the Salvation Army (SB)	Singing the Faith (StF)
Hymns Ancient & Modern: New Standard Edition (AMNS)	Common Ground (CG)

Hymns on pilgrimage and journeying with God

Amazing Grace	AMNS587	CH4 555	HON34	SB453	StF440
Be thou my vision	AMNS343	CH4 465	HON66		
Holy God, your pilgrim people			HON334		
Lord of all hopefulness	AMNS713	CH4 166	HON467	SB772	StF2197
Guide me, oh my great redeemer	AMNS652	CH4 167	HON275	SB27	StF465
Oh Jesus, I have promised	AMNS748	CH4 644	HON556	SB613	StF563
Oh God, you search me and you know me	AMNS747	CH4 97	HON549	StF728	
Onward Christian Soldiers	AMNS758	CH4514	HON599	SB971	
The Lord's my shepherd	AMNS799	CH4 14	HON723	SB62	StF480
We are marching in the light of God	AMNS483	CH4 516	HON789	SB903	StF2235

Hymns for this week

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud	CH4 133
Lord, for the years	AMNS715 CG74 CH4 159 SB816
Praise to the Lord for the joys of the earth	CH4 165
New every morning is the love	AMNS4 CH4 214 SB664 StF137

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I, the Lord of sea and sky	AMNS 494	CH4 251	HON376	SB1002
Tree of Life and awesome mystery	CH4 401	CG136		
One more step along the world I go	AMNS 757	CH4 530	CG100	StF476
Will you come and follow me?	AMNS510	CH4 533	CG148	SB695 StF673
Spirit of truth and grace	CH4 608	CG119		
Come, living God, when least expected	AMNS 615	CH4 609		
We sing a love that sets all people free	CH4 622			

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PRAYERS

APPROACH TO GOD

God who is,
God who has been,
God who will be;
faithful God,
journeying God,
God with us;
you are our God,
beyond us in mystery,
with us in struggle,
and guiding us onwards.
Your faithfulness we praise.
Your name we call upon.
Your presence we worship.
We are here,
on this holy ground,
in this time,
offering our lives and our selves to you.
We come open to your Spirit,
and trusting in the love of your Son, Jesus,

Amen

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CONFESSIO

God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob,
your faithfulness echoes down the centuries,
yet too often our commitment is much less certain.
Forgive us, Lord.

God of Moses, of Mary, of Peter,
your call invites us to follow your way of love,
yet too often we seek excuses and an easier path.
Forgive us, Lord.

God of Israel, of Palestine, of all nations,
your concern is for justice and peace,
yet too often we ignore the cries of the oppressed.
Forgive us, Lord.

God of gardens, of wilderness, of all creation,
you have given us such wonders to care for,
yet too often we don't acknowledge the damage we do.
Forgive us, Lord.

God of justice, of peace, of love,
help us to know that you do forgive us,

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setting us free from our past failings,
making us new,
and inviting us on a new stage in our journey with you.

Thank you, Lord.

Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Jesus, God with us,
we gather as your body
in this time and place,
and open our hearts and minds to other places,
to other people,
to your whole creation in all its beauty and brokenness.

As the earth cries out,
as temperatures rise,
as oceans change,
as creatures die out,
open our ears to hear the cries of creation.

May your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

As people cry out,

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as land dries out,
as floods wash away futures,
as food and water become scarce,
open our eyes to see what is happening.

May your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

As neighbours cry out,
as wars destroy,
as violence tears apart,
as occupation divides,
open our minds to understand our place in the world.

May your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

As friends cry out,
as death claims our futures,
as loss shakes our present,
as fear blocks the way ahead,
open our hearts to know that you are with us all.

May your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Jesus, God with us,

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as we open our ears and eyes, our minds and hearts,
pour out your Spirit upon us,
that we would be transformed.

Then may our words and actions be guided by you,
to change minds and hearts,
and so to change your world.

May your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Amen