

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 3 - SEPTEMBER 17TH

“GOD’S COMPANIONSHIP ON THE JOURNEY”

THOUGHTS ON THE READINGS

EXODUS 14: 19-31

This passage brings us to the conclusion of Egypt's rule over the Israelites, to the climax of where the first 14 chapters of the book of Exodus have been leading. After Pharaoh had let the people go, God leads Israel out on the long rather than the short route in order to avoid war (13:17). God then chooses to harden Pharaoh's heart (14:4) in order that the Egyptians will have the opportunity to learn that He is Lord. Moses, confident in the presence of God with them in all the danger to come, wisely instructs the Israelites not to be afraid but instead to 'be still' knowing that God will fight for them (14:13-14).

The fact that verse 19 speaks of an angel of God who has been travelling with Israel's army tells us that, in this case, God chose to accompany the Israelites on their journey with a concrete manifestation of his presence. When we come to verse 21, and later again in verse 26, we see the Lord tell Moses to 'stretch out' his hand in order to impart the action of parting and rejoining the waters. Of course the action of Moses is a display of the way the spirit of the Lord can work through

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someone in order to produce wonders. This miracle is an example of God's presence through the faithful obedience of others; particularly leaders and teachers.

We can note also in verse 21 the mention of a 'strong east wind' as the way the waters were held back. While some scholars look on this as a natural phenomenon it is unlikely that the Israelites saw this happening as a purely natural thing. There would be no question in their minds that God is more than capable of using the force of the nature he created.

These verses take us from a point where the Israelites were uncertain and trapped at the Red Sea, yet the presence of God had not abandoned them on their journey. Instead, through His people and His amazing use of nature, He created a way through the impasse on their journey. Surely the Lord still finds ways through the impasses of life for those who trust him on life's journey.

PSALM 114

In this very brief Psalm three major Old Testament happenings are brought to the fore in a continuum of divine activity on the people of Israel. God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (vs. 1), the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem (vs. 2) and God's leading through Joshua to the conquest of Canaan (vs.3-6). It gives a sense of an overview of history and reminds readers that God has not abandoned them in past struggles, instead delivering them through to make good his promises.

The poetic way the psalmist refers to the sea as having 'looked and fled', Jordan 'turning back' and the mountains leaping (vs. 3-4) is testimony to that fact that in all cases God was there with his people. All these things are said to have happened when these realms of nature were in the 'presence of the Lord' (vs. 7). The waters parted not because the Israelites were there but because God was there. Spurgeon commenting on this Psalm wrote "In like manner, my brethren, if God be in the midst of our church, nothing can withstand its onward march." *

Nature's response to the presence of God should remind us not to lose the sense of awe that can be found in being so close to Him. Where the Lord is most loved, he is most revered and the wonder of his presence is felt. Having faith should not leads us to a place of familiarity that casts out awe, but instead to a point of total wonder that this mighty father should love even me.

Verse 8 stands as a reminder that when we are journeying in the presence of the Lord, his providence and power to serve our most basic needs is never lacking. He has the power to turn rock, flint in some translations, into springs of life giving water. Christ would go on to say (John 4:14) 'but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' (NRSV) What solace we can take from journeying with one who can provide in abundance for our greatest needs.

* Spurgeon, Charles Haddon "Commentary on Psalm 114: Spurgeon's verse expositions of the Bible"

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ROMANS 14: 1-12

Paul demonstrates a balanced attitude which many of us will struggle with. Have you ever found your love being tested by another Christian who disagrees with you about a particular matter? It might be the contents of a worship service, or the clothes it is appropriate to wear, or activities that should not be conducted on the Sabbath. Paul refuses to allow other people's principles to dictate how he will live. He is prepared to respect their principles in order to show them they are loved and respected, without compromising his own principles.

Across Christian denominations we see a multitude of ways to live out our faith, but one thing remains the same; that Christ died and returned to life so that we may be saved. As we journey through life together there will be people we disagree with, but Paul gives us good advice as to how to approach a brother or sister who disagrees with us about how God's people should live.

- Respect one another

Paul limited his activity in others' presence to ensure they were not put off by his freedom in Christ. Our desire must be to pursue peace, rather than our own disciples who agree with everything we think and say. This way we develop 'strong' Christians who are mature and continue the cycle of respect.

- Know what it is God is asking of you

Your relationship with God should be your primary concern. It is this that will determine your actions, to which you will be held accountable on the last day.

- Do not judge others on their decisions

God will take care of them, just as He will us.

- Do not be harassed into conforming

As we grow in faith, we become mature Christians who know the freedom that comes from Christ. However, we can all be 'weak' Christians who are still adjusting. Find your conformity in Christ, rather than to a view that is not what God is asking of you.

Our church is the place where we grow in faith and discover what God is requiring of us. We are not here to judge others, to get them to agree with us. Rather we are here to demonstrate what it means to put others first, as Christ did. Only then will there be harmonious fellowship in the church.

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MATTHEW 18: 21-35

This passage comes towards the end of Jesus' ministry and in the chapter before there has been a particular focus on teaching the disciples, in order that they may teach others after His death and resurrection.

Peter wanted a rule to obey when it came to forgiveness; a clear directive as to how many times he should forgive the same person. It is difficult to respond to a fellow-disciple's wrong doing, particularly when we are directly affected. We know we should forgive, but to what degree? Where is the limit to our forgiveness? What is the extent of the situations in which we find ourselves having to forgive?

In this parable, the amount owed in the first instance was ten thousand talents; the largest Greek numeral and the largest unit of currency. One talent was a small fortune, but ten thousand was almost inconceivable. The second sum owed, one hundred denarii was around one hundred days' wages; significant but not unimaginable. In comparison, the second man owed a six-hundred-thousandth of the first and there was no forgiveness.

God's grace is as unimaginable as owing ten thousand talents and having the debt paid. At great cost God has forgiven us in order to re-establish a relationship with us. Therefore, it is expected that as we have been forgiven by God, we will forgive others for their significantly lesser debts against us. If we do not, then we suffer the consequences; not only of emotional stress and relationship breakdown, but of separation from God Himself.

If we forgive, because we have been forgiven by God, we find that the consequences are just as significant. Our church fellowship is strengthened, we share a mutual understanding and can build the Kingdom in the places we find ourselves. As we share in the Lord's Prayer together as a congregation of God's people, sharing our faith journey together, we are reminded to 'forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors'.



SERMON THOUGHTS

'Life is a journey; long is the road,' wrote Salvation Army General Albert Orsborn in his song reflecting on John 4 (Salvation Army Song Book 430) and we most certainly get from our Old Testament readings the sense of God's people journeying in life. We also learn from our Exodus reading that God sometimes leads us down the long road for our own sakes. But every step of the way the Israelites are certain of the nearness of the Lord. In life we too should have the faith to know, and fellowship in, the near presence of God.

Look for the presence of God.

The presence of God can be found in our midst every day. We can see it in his handiwork; in the wonder of creation, in the power of the elements, in the beauty of nature. We can find the presence of God through his people, the faithful who have passed on great scriptural truths and lead others to Christ. We can see it in the very people who led us to Christ, who have prayed for us in life and supported us both spiritual and physically when we needed it. God sometimes works in mysterious ways, but don't let the everyday ways that God works in your life go unnoticed.

Abide in the presence of God

The New Testament verses remind us of the danger of becoming distracted from the presence of God, even perhaps taking steps away from God by allowing sin to construct a barrier between us. While we know arguments, intolerance and lack of forgiveness can turn us away from the joy of walking with the Lord, our actions in other areas can also become obstacles. Becoming caught up in our own desires, while failing to be aware of the effects of our consumption on the lives of others around the world can also stop us listening fully to what God desires for us. It is vital that by our actions and ceaseless prayer, we maintain our communion with God to keep walking in His way daily.

Be the presence of God

God reveals himself in a concrete way in Exodus through the presence of an angel, but to many the concrete way God reveals himself today will be through the testimony of our lives. One of the ways we might do that is considering our lifestyle choices and whether they truly reflect a Godly care for creation. Living as a good steward of God's creation can be a powerful witness to others and encourage a change in attitudes that words alone cannot manage.

As a constant companion on life's journey, God teaches us that we are loved and that we should love too. People will see the presence of God with you by the love that you show through words and action, and know that they too have been in the presence of God.

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ALL AGE ADDRESS

Ask the children what are the five most important things to take with you when you go...

- Camping e.g. tent, stove, sleeping bag, food, water
- To school e.g. pencil case, diary, homework, lunch, bus pass
- Shopping e.g. purse, bags for life, shopping list, good walking shoes, phone
- On a picnic e.g. food, drink, picnic blanket, sun tan lotion, umbrella
- Etc.

In all those places, and everywhere else, THE most important thing to take with you is God.

As Christians, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to talk to God at any time and in any place.

The Holy Spirit also helps us become who God wants us to be; loving, patient, kind, generous and compassionate.

In every activity we do, can we take God with us in prayer and in our attitude?

- God with us changes the way that we talk to people, so we are slower to get angry and don't gossip about others.
- God with us changes how we look at the world around us, so we appreciate the beauty of creation and act to protect and nurture it.
- God with us changes how we view our belongings, so we recognise that they belong to God and we are more generous and willing to share what we have with others,
- God with us helps us to notice when people are treated badly, in our local community and in the wider world, and speak out about it.

God is already everywhere, but we need to wake up to His presence and realise that He is with us wherever we go. Then when we face a difficult situation, we know we are not alone. Equally, when we are experiencing something good and exciting, we know that God is celebrating with us.

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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 for this week

Abide with me	AMNS13	CH4 580	HON6	SB529
StF141				
As the deer pants	CH4 550	HON43	SB571	StF544
Be still, for the presence of	CG12	CH4 189	HON62	SB353
Of the Lord	StF20			
Brother, sister let me	CG16	CH4 694	HON91	SB1005
serve you	StF611			
Lord, for the years	CG74	CH4 159	SB816	StF470
Lord I come before	HON457	SB378	StF58	
Lord of all hopefulness	AMNS394	CH4 166	HON467	SB772
	StF526			
Lord of creation, to you be	CH4 500	HON471	SB380	StF449
all praise				
Lord, you have come to	CG79			
the lakeside				

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Someone cares	SB 10			
Walk with me, oh my Lord	HON788			
Will you come and follow me	CG148	CH4 533	HON834	SB695
StF673				

PRAYERS

COMING BEFORE GOD

O God, Creator and Father, we praise you for the marvel of beauty in which you have set our lives; for your love, new every morning, shedding upon us the life-giving power of your holiness. May we never accept as commonplace the mystery of creation. May the beauty of your holiness flood our lives, washing away all that is mean and sordid, so that we may approach your throne of grace today and that we may do you honour and glory. Help us, dear Lord, as we worship today to take stock of our thoughts and actions, making sure that first and foremost we are loving you. Refresh us in our motivation to serve by your spirit's power.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

In The Salvation Army, the officer or person leading the service would remind the congregation of those things which need to be considered for prayer. Things would be mentioned for prayer on an international level, national level, local level and then those things from within our own fellowship. This might also include prayers for our environment as a gift from God. Following that everybody would be invited to offer prayers to the Lord. Anybody from within the body of the congregation would be able to offer a prayer out loud as everybody prays from the stillness of their hearts. After a few people have prayed the officer or meeting leader would close the time of prayer with their own prayer, unscripted, from the heart, led by the spirit.

PRAISE

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From Psalm 136 (Response in bold to be read by congregation)

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures for ever.

Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures for ever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures for ever.

To him who alone does great wonders, who by his understanding made the heavens, who spread out the earth upon the waters

His love endures for ever.

Who made the great lights – the sun to govern the day, the moon and stars to govern the night;

His love endures for ever.

To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt and brought Israel out from among them with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;

His love endures for ever.

To him who divided the Red Sea asunder and brought Israel through the midst of it,

but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea;

His love endures for ever.

He remembered us in our low estate and freed us from our enemies.

His love endures for ever.

He gives food to every creature.

His love endures for ever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures for ever.

Amen

BENEDICTION

May God be in our whole being, before he is in our ministry.

May God be in our hearts as well as our heads.

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May God be in our loving, and our knowing and our willing, and our speaking and our acting.

May we readily see God in others and the whole of your creation,

And may our lives be a testimony to your glory, Lord.

God the Father enrich with his grace,

God the Son make you holy in his love,

God the Holy Spirit strengthen you with his joy.

The Lord bless and keep you in eternal life.

Now may Spirit and Word be forever married in our experience; may the heat of joy and the light of truth burn in our hearts; and may we, who with unveiled faces behold the glory of Christ, become increasingly transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord.

Amen