

Creation Time 2018

Passing our planet on

September 2018 Week 4: Passing on the gift of service

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Introduction

Worship material for Creation Time 2018 comes from an ecumenical writing group, with contributors from the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church.

It follows the theme “Passing our Planet on: God’s gift to us”, linking to Scotland’s Year of Young People, also highlighted in our Annual Gathering in April. It reflects on our planet passing on from one generation to the next, and the gifts given us by God to support and guide us in our care for creation.

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

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”.

This year Christian leaders signed a joint statement of support for the Season of Creation. This represents the first joint statement of support for the season reaching across denominations

http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Season_of_Creation_2018.pdf

Members of the Creation Time 2018 Writing Group:

Sally Foster-Fulton is an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland. She is Head of Christian Aid Scotland and a trustee of Eco-Congregation Scotland.

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 trustee 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 makes 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.

Miriam McHardy is a member of the Roman Catholic Church and has worked for many years in the area of faith, justice and the environment. As part of a relatively new eco-congregation she is interested in exploring how our faith can support care for our planet.

Lindsey Sanderson is a United Reformed Church minister, serving three congregations in the Joint Pastorate of East Kilbride and Hamilton. One of her congregations, Righead URC, is in the process of applying for an Eco-Congregation Award.

Proverbs 31:10-31

This passage is an acrostic poem. There are 22 lines, each starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is an exploration of a wife and a mother, perhaps that of the author, or of Lemeul in the previous verses. She is a willing worker and her work is fruitful. She exercises responsibility for the provision of food and clothing for the household by cooking and sewing. She manages financial and business affairs outside of the home. Her family lacks nothing but she also cares for the needy and is generous to the poor. She fulfils a wise teaching ministry by giving good counsel to others. She is alert to opportunities and responds to the needs of others. The role of the woman is described very much in parity with the role of men in these responsibilities. As in Genesis, men and women have been given authority in the world on God's behalf. Likewise, the most important feature is her faithfulness to the Lord, to her husband and to her family.

She does her utmost to create a good home life, a nurturing and sustaining environment for her family. A good home life requires effort from all who live there however. What we put into making a house a home adds to the fulfilment of family life that can be a fine thread and easily frayed, if not snapped. Throughout the book of Proverbs it is suggested that everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, has a part to play in holding together the basic social unit created by God for the welfare of the whole human race.

It is the same in the church. As a family of God's people we must care for and nurture one another; not leaving it to one gender or age group but participating together to create a thriving environment.



It is the responsibility of all to ensure that service and fellowship are keeping our families and churches supportive and growing. Here, the woman of noble character has much to teach the women, men and children of our church. If we were all to be faithful to God and each other we would see heaven!

Psalm 1

This is a psalm of faith. The promise of prosperity is not a pledge of good fortune in return for good behaviour, rather this world is God's and those who side with God will surely and ultimately enjoy blessing. This is also a psalm of commitment. The commitment of God's people is to a distinct lifestyle and to the word of God.

The blessing and the subsequent happiness are by-products of the commitment to a life that is right by God. This should affect our whole being, and for us today include a distinctive Christian lifestyle.

This includes seeking God's guidance rather than being easily swayed in attitude and action by those around us. We need to be the tree that withstands buffeting winds and, as it flourishes, blesses others around us; not only other people but the rest of creation. The chaff could be blown away by the lightest of winds and its removal brings cleanliness in its place. In our lives we may need the chaff removed to be people of righteousness.

In the Old Testament the word 'righteous' is used to describe God's people. It refers to their respect and honour for God and God's laws. It also suggests a certain way of living that is different to their neighbours. As we seek to live according to God's will it will permeate our every action, thought and conversation. In each of our human relationships, our relationship with God is reflected. Can we be people who reflect God in our relationships, so that whatever position we hold, the power and authority we have are used to bless rather than exploit? Can those of us who work under authority do so in such a way that we would work for God?

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" James writes in his letter to Christians. What a question, but wouldn't it be great to be remembered as wise?

If you're going to be wise you're going to have to be humble, because humility comes from wisdom, heavenly wisdom that is. Earthly wisdom is envious and selfishly ambitious;

earthly wisdom is where you get disorder and every evil practice. If you're going to be a follower of Christ, says James, if you are going to be like Him in heavenly wisdom then you are going to have to show humility. Jesus-like wisdom has nothing to do with how much you know, it is all about how you live. Sometimes Christians are far more focused on being right than righteous. We might claim to have Godly wisdom but in the process are so focussed on being right that we forget to be compassionate. Can we be surprised then when we are ignored and discounted?

In this passage James gives us valuable advice on how we can be sure the wisdom we follow is heaven focussed. If you are going to be Christ-like, if you want to be holy just as He is holy, then you have to work at this kind of wisdom. It goes something like this:

Am I pure in motives and actions?

Is my reason for doing things Godly or worldly?

Is my reason for what I do because I'd like to do it this way, or is it because this is the way Jesus would do it?

Am I looking for common ground?

Am I looking for a way to move on from a falling out?

Am I considerate and can I keep being considerate, and keep showing respect regardless of provocation?

When I need to speak, can I do so in the right manner?

Am I teachable or am I someone who always has to be right?

If I can't be taught how can I learn what I need to learn?

Where is the wisdom in that?

James challenges us too about how merciful we are. We're often very happy to receive mercy but not so keen to dispense it. Sometimes the most merciful thing we can do is say nothing and walk away, praying that God will act in justice, for revenge belongs only to God. We should give mercy because we have been shown immense mercy.

Finally, in my daily interactions do I produce good fruit?

Is it obvious that I am a Christ follower without even opening my mouth?

How fair am I?

Do I give everyone every opportunity regardless of who they are and am I sincere?

Do I really live all of this in daily life as well as in a church context?

James reminds us that to really serve God we need to make ourselves humble before God. Only then will we be truly wise.

[Mark 9:30-37](#)

Have you ever missed some very important information because you weren't really listening? I'm sure we've all been in a classroom where the teacher has asked the person who was talking to repeat back exactly the instructions they just gave the class. Perhaps we've been in the position as adults that we know we were distracted when some instructions were given but were too embarrassed to ask the person to repeat themselves.

Jesus gave the disciples some really important information. He explained to them that He was going to be killed at the hands of men, *but* He would rise again after three days. The first time Jesus spoke about His death in Mark (Chapter 8) the disciples didn't really take Him seriously, Peter even took Him to one side to have a word about talking like that. This time they're not really listening properly because they are arguing about who is the greatest! Luke's gospel (Chapter 22) tells us that as Jesus was explaining His death again at the last meal with them, once again they broke into an argument about who was the greatest. Perhaps it was then that Jesus looked around the room and saw a lot of proud hearts and dirty feet, so showed them what real service and humility meant by washing their dirty feet (John 13). The washing of feet was a job left to the lowest of all the servants. It was the job nobody wanted to do or been seen to do, yet here was the Lord of all serving like this.

No servant is greater than his master, and Jesus is *the* master. Nor is a messenger greater than the sender, and *we* (including the disciples) are the messengers. None of us are greater than Christ Himself and He taught time and again that we must be prepared to humble ourselves to the lowest level. Jesus washed their feet to remind them that the man they called teacher (a very important high status job) and Lord (a very important person)

was willing to act as a servant to others and that being willing to serve others was what being a follower of Christ meant. If we ever look with disgust on a job in service to God that needs doing because it's beneath our status or pay grade, we're as good as saying, "I think I'm better than Jesus".

In this reading from Mark we are reminded of service and humility by Christ once more. He instructs us that if we want to be the greatest, we have to become the least. *"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (9:35)*. We must even submit ourselves to serving the little children because by serving others we directly serve the Lord.

Sermon ideas

Can you imagine being invited to dinner at Buckingham Palace when at the end of the meal the Queen stands up, takes off her crown and says, "would you mind passing down your plates", then goes and does the washing up? Yet what Jesus does in today's gospel was just as ridiculous in the eyes of the disciples. When all the disciples had been arguing about which one of them was the greatest, Jesus, the undeniable greatest of all time, stands up, takes off His shirt and does the job of the servants!

Service is an essential component of the Christian faith and Jesus made it clear that it was not optional. It is also clear in scripture that we cannot consider anyone lower than ourselves or undeserving of our service. When you serve, what are you contributing to any community you are part of so that the name of Jesus can be glorified through your actions? People will see God in your humble actions more than they ever will in flashy statements.

Salvation Army soldiers and officers wear two 'S's with pride on our uniform, a sign of the covenant we have undertaken. These remind us that we are 'saved to serve'. At a Salvationist funeral the last act is to have all the soldiers and officers salute the coffin and say "Servant of God, well done!" I hope when I'm promoted to eternal glory that my life's service will be such that they really mean it when they say it.

One of the vital ways Christians have been serving Jesus is by acting to care for and protect our environment. The destruction of the natural environment has had a terrible effect on many creatures and communities around the world, as well as the unknown impact in the future. When we try to act as stewards of our earth, instead of its owners, we serve both our planet today and the generations to come, passing on the gift of creation that God gave us. All Christians are people called to service, and no one else can do what God calls *you* to do for God. What action of service for the environment can you take in your life that will care for God's world?

General Booth, founder of The Salvation Army, once said; “God has had all that there was of me. There have been men with greater brains than I, even with greater opportunities, but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart and caught a vision of what Jesus Christ could do with me and them, on that day I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth there was. And if there is anything of power in the Salvation Army, it is because God has had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life.”

Will you offer all there is of you for service to God?

Time with children

There is lots of poetry in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms, but there are poems in other places too. Most of the poems are about praise and are used to worship God. When we sing our hymns, they are poems but with musical accompaniment.

The Old Testament Bible reading this week (Proverbs 31:10-31) is an acrostic poem, a poem where, if you take the first letter of each line, a word is spelled out. Proverbs 31 it spells out the Hebrew alphabet.

Invite the children/ young people to work together in small groups to write an acrostic poem in praise of God.

It might be good to have the words PRAISE GOD as your starting letters (see below) to write a poem of praise. Or the groups could think of a different word or phrase they would like to work from.

P
R
A
I
S
E
G
O
D

This could be done as a congregational activity, with different people suggesting a line, or as an individual activity. One or two could then share their poem aloud.



Encourage the groups to look at the letter S in their poems. What words or phrases have they used there?

In today's readings we have been encouraged to think about service, or being servants to others as Jesus taught us to be. When we are followers of Jesus, no matter whether we are old or young, we have a responsibility to serve Him.

During the month of September we are encouraged to think especially about how part of that service is caring better for the environment and God's wider creation. One of the ways we might do this is to learn from older members of our community, and what they have done to care for our environment.

To develop this idea further the leaders might invite children to sit with older members of the congregation and share ideas of how to care for their world, and how they would like the world to be.

Encourage the older members of the congregation to share stories of what they try to do (this might include gardening and recycling) and what they learnt from their parents and grandparents. This might be adjusted for time, depending on the age ranges of the children/ young people!

The session might end by reminding all generations that they have served God by taking time to listen and learn from one another.

Prayers

Prayer of approach

Father God, we come before You as Your children, seeking Your face and knowing Your care. We come to worship, to praise You, but also to hear from You afresh today.

Jesus Christ, as we sit here in the quiet, we remember Your times of secluded prayer. We bring to You the things that cause us anguish and anxiety, asking that You would share the burden with us.

Holy Spirit, as we come before You this morning [evening] we bring ourselves as we are, asking You to draw close to us. May Your power be at work within us and around us, transforming us into Your likeness.

Amen



Prayer of thanksgiving

Almighty God, we bring to You our grateful thanks for the many wondrous blessings we have.

For the changing seasons and the change in flora and fauna, for the crops and the food in our fridges, for the companionship of friends and families and for the demonstration of Your love for us in them.

We thank You for the people who have taught us, inspired us and encouraged us, for the health to be here today and the faith to trust You for the future.

Amen

Confession

Lord God, we come before You as sinners who know we are saved by Your grace. We pray again for that grace and for Your mercy.

Grant us forgiveness for the thoughts, for the attitude, for the actions and for the conversations that did not reveal we are Your children. Help us to forgive those who have hurt us, in their words or lack thereof.

May we be people of mercy and grace in the same way we seek Your mercy and grace for ourselves.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

During a time of silent prayer, invite those present to pray prayers of intercession for the people God has laid on their hearts. Give an opportunity for some to pray aloud, but be prepared to leave silence and allow each person to present their requests before God.

Musical suggestions

Hymns for this week:

- CH4 505 – “All that I am, all that I do”
- CH4 694– “Brother, sister, let me serve you”
- CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations”
- “Lord, I would be available” – See <https://hymnary.org/> for sources
- “King of kings, majesty” – See <https://hymnary.org/> for sources
- CH4 644 – “Oh Jesus I have promised”
- CH4 374 – “The servant king”
- CH4694 – “The Servant song”
- CH4 544 – “When I needed a neighbour were you there, were you there?”
- “Would you be free from your burden of sin?” – See <https://hymnary.org/> for sources

Passing our planet on: God’s gift to us:

- CH4 137 – “All things bright and beautiful”
- CH4 724 – “A Touching Place”
- CH4 231 – “For the fruits of his creation”
- CH4 623 – “Gather us in”
- CH4 153 – “Great is thy faithfulness”
- CH5 525 – “Let there be love shared among us”

- The Song Book of the Salvation Army 605– “Lord of Heaven and earth and sea”
- CH4 212 – “Morning has broken”
- CH4 644 – “Oh Jesus, I have promised”
- CH4 530 – “One more step along the world I go”

Resources for World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation – 1/9/2018

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 fourth year, the aid agency, CAFOD, provides resources to support this day at:

<https://cafod.org.uk/News/Campaigning-news/World-Day-of-Prayer>

The Columban Missionaries also offer a range of resources at:

<http://www.columbans.co.uk/justice-peace-jpic-2/creation-time/>