



20TH SEPTEMBER: WEEK 3:

Prayers.



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Notes

These prayers are based on motifs and themes found in the lectionary readings (and their alternates) for Proper 20 (Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost). I have tried to write them in a way which will work with whichever of the OT readings are used.

In the opening prayer I have split the responding voices into two. In view of the fact that dividing responders according to a Male/Female binary can be seen as excluding, I have simply labelled these V1 and V2 but the responders can be divided by different criteria as appropriate. Similarly I have given 'their' and 'they' as alternative personal pronouns to 'he' and 'his' with respect to God.

in the prayer of approach there is an additional optional line which can be used if the service involves Communion.

In the assurance of forgiveness I have offered two possible options: in one the payer is said by the whole congregation and in the other by the person leading the service. In the latter instance there is also the option for the person leading to use a 'we/us/our' form rather than a 'you/your' form.

Opening responses

L: God the faithful listener
V1: is waiting to be found and known
V2: and will answer those who are calling
All: Let us bless his/their name together

L: God the patient watcher
V1: is waiting to be found and known
V2: and will meet those who are seeking to change
All: Let us bless his/their name together

L: God the generous provider
M: is waiting to be found and known
F: and will reach out to those who are in need
All: let us bless his/their name together

L: God the wellspring of all life
V1: is present with us now
V2: waiting to be found and known
All: let us bless his/their name together

Approach

L: God of transition and change
throughout all history
All: you have led your people on challenging journeys

L: God of transition and change
across all times and cultures
All: you have called your people to discomfoting tasks

L: God of transition and change
within all systems of human value
All you have asked your people to look and question

L: God of transition and change
meet with us now
through word and music
(bread and wine)
**All: challenge our thinking
and deepen our understanding
that we may be ready to follow you
into the challenges of this time**

Thanksgiving

God -
we thank you that you always listen
even when our voices are less than joyful.

We thank you that you still wait for us
even when we dawdle or drag our feet.

We thank you that your generosity always overflows
even when we are grudging of its bounty to others

God -
we thank you
that you are always, and completely,
yourself
and that your love is therefore never limited
by our smallness
Amen

Confession

(to be said by all)

God of challenge and change
the stories from your word
show us how great the gap can sometimes be
between divine and human economies.
Forgive us
when we have let attachment
to our own comfort and convenience
deter us from committing to the costly transitions
necessary for the wellbeing of our planet
and the flourishing of all its inhabitants

silence or a kyrie

God of compassion and concern
the stories from your word
show us how great the gap can sometimes be
between divine and human tenderness.
Forgive us
when we have let attachment
to our own understandings of justice and righteousness

deter us for following the the discomforting paths
necessary for the wellbeing of our planet
and the flourishing of all its inhabitants

silence or a kyrie

God of generosity and grace
the stories of your Word
show us how great the gap can sometimes be
between divine and human understanding.
Forgive us
when we have let attachment
to our own sense of hierarchy and entitlement
deter us from making the difficult shifts
necessary for the wellbeing of our planet
and the flourishing of all its inhabitants.

silence or a kyrie

Assurance of forgiveness

Either

**All: God
Your compassion for our weakness
and concern for our wellbeing
give us confidence
in the generosity of your forgiveness.**

**Out of the liberality of your grace
help us, as we begin again,
to grow into the courage, love, and understanding
which are the hallmarks of your Kingdom,
and to live in ways
which will help to make this world
a place where all life can flourish.
Amen**

or

Minister

God who has compassion on your/our weakness
and concern for our wellbeing

give you/us confidence
in the generosity of his/their forgiveness

and, out of the liberality of his/their grace
help you/us, as you/we begin again,
to grow into the courage, love, and understanding
which are the hallmarks of his/their Kingdom;
and to live in ways
which will help to make this world
a place where all life can flourish.
Amen

Collect

God of the different way -
you are not bound
to human hierarchies and understandings.
Help us to grow
out of our reflex and restricted
habits of thought and action
and into the extraordinary and expansive
patterns of your Kingdom
that we may become
agents of change and healing
in the world.
Amen

Blessing

May the blessing
of the disconcerting God be on you/us
the blessings of challenge and change;
the blessings of travel and transition;
the blessings of discovery and deepening;
the blessings of flourishing and fulfilment -
May these blessings of the Kingdom
be yours/ours
Amen

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Framework for prayer of Intercession in Creation Time



Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.

Things are changing so fast that particular pressing concerns cannot be anticipated. Thus a framework is offered, which can see us through the Season of Creation, and give continuity.

Let us pray with Christ:

God, who makes us with the Earth
God, who gives us to the world
God; God-with us in our struggles:

**Hear us, stand with fears and needs
And walk, hold hands, advise, encourage.**

for the world

*What have we heard, in the news this week?
Who is in need and who should give thanks?
How far have we got, and where have we stumbled?*

*And what seems completely beyond us?
Listen for Earth's voice: what is it saying?
We remember our neighbours, of whatever species
We pray for our enemies, and those we fear.
And pray for peace throughout Creation.*

**Hear us, stand with fears and needs
And walk, hold hands, advise, encourage.**

for the church

*Give thanks for the faithfulness, undergirding prayer.
Be open about continuing divisions, including local ones.
Look to a greater integration of environmental concern in our life and work.
And seek openness to the joy of deeper fellowship with all Creation*

**Hear us, stand with fears and needs
And walk, hold hands, advise, encourage.**

for ourselves

*In silence: bring to God what no one else need hear: not for God to 'hear'
but to remind ourselves that God knows and understands.*

*Pray for those we pray with, acknowledging and respecting
what they cannot share with us.*

*Look for support and perseverance,
and some sustaining sign when we get things right.*

*Pray for 'impatience' - not simply to accept 'the way things are'
And pray for peace in our heart, and the fuller joys of Christ.*

**Hear us, stand with fears and needs
And walk, hold hands, advise, encourage.
AMEN**

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Exodus 16.2–15



**Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation
Scotland.**

Toxic nostalgia! And yet survival is the imperative, endangered by dwelling on the fictional luxury of the carefree life of a slave. Or the 'good old days' of churches which could think and act freely in far more exclusive ways than might be acceptable today.

This passage may be depressingly familiar, even to many within our churches. Those times when it seems no good deed goes unpunished. A response is made, the best that can be in the circumstances, and all the grumblers have to say is "What is it?"

The people ignorantly exercise their new-found freedom in lashing out against those who work hardest for their liberation and wellbeing. Again, does this ring any bells in our own most recent history?

To make it worse, they are suffering genuine and immediate hardship, which can't be soothed or argued away. The grumblers do have a point. It's compelling, and easy to get sucked in to.

To accompany real change is like being a partner at a birth. (And I'm recalling here some of the most exhausting few We may have to wait a while for gratitude and appreciation. The demands made on us may be extreme, but they arise out of the horizon-blocked urgency of pain and distress.

So if, in a hard-pressed community, in the endless between-times of the desert, there is grumbling, the grumbled-against may need first to listen.

Taken alone, 'facts' may mislead: slave-drivers would have no interest in damaging their workforce through starvation. Thus the road to freedom seems harsh by comparison.

The costs of a Just Transition - from our enslavement to those fossil fuels that have led to climate imbalance and the extinction of vital wildlife - seem high. And the real and sustaining benefits (clean air, better health, less stress) are not readily recognised in advance of a more thorough transition. Or if they are recognised, the distress of those on the sharp end of redundancies and economic slumps makes it hard for them to be sufficiently valued.

Dishonesty about 'solutions' doesn't help either. No more than falsely taking on board a responsibility which is not completely yours. Liberation is an arduous journey. Moses and Aaron are right, and maybe courageous to remind the people of God's involvement. But is there any other time and place where leaders can simply, or conveniently blame God, or blame 'the way things are'?

But pray, deeply and earnestly, for those who try to get the truth across. As well as noting the gracious approach of God when the 'grumbling' of the people, is not without cause.

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Psalm 105.1–6, 37–45



Rev Rodolphe Blanchard-Cowal

Church of Scotland minister, Portlethen, former professional musician, also from the United Protestant Church of France.

"We pray this Sunday with an excerpt from this Psalm of praise. Psalm 105 has a characteristic shared with a few others: it tells the story of Israel's salvation — here it speaks of the Exodus and the entry into the Promised Land. The tone of this Psalm is all praise. There is no allusion to sin in it. The psalmist praises God with all his heart. Moreover, it is a liturgical call — a call to Israel to pray.

In this liturgy, there are the people and God, as well as other characters from the history of Israel: Abraham and the Egyptians.

The Egyptians are mentioned because of the evocation of the Exodus.

Abraham appears twice, and both times he is presented as the servant of the Lord. The father of the nation is above all someone who serves God.

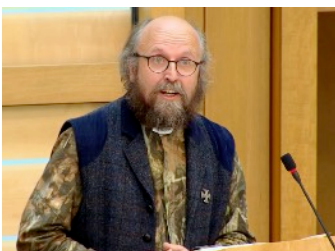
In the desert, the Psalm tells us, the people lacked nothing. The Lord provided for their financial and physical needs, protected them night and day, and met their needs for food and water. Finally, they were given land to settle on. For all this, Israel is called to praise the Lord. The Lord did all this so that His people would bear witness to the laws He gave them. According to Jesus, the law of the Lord is primarily about loving God and your neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40).

At Creation Time, we can interpret this Psalm, pray with it and express our gratitude by seeing ourselves as Israel in the desert, in exodus, fleeing from Egypt and entering the Promised Land. The Egypt from which the Hebrews fled would be our world today marked by consumerism, waste and pollution. The Psalm shows us how the Lord provides for all our basic needs, if we leave this contemporary Egypt that oppresses us and destroys the environment. By leaving it, the Lord gives us the goods we need for our lives, provided we obey his law of love and justice. And Christ leads us to the Promised Land — He opens the door to the Kingdom of God.”

This Psalm offers the most positive gloss on the Exodus stories, to motivate and encourage those engaged in a struggle - perhaps with desperation - to “Search for the Lord and his strength; continually seek his face.” The challenges of our day demand that we do not neglect the encouragement, pampering, and enjoyment that sustains our hope and thereby any commitment we have to embrace; and respond with courage and creativity to the global changes that it is beyond us to avoid or divert.

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Jonah 3.10 – 4.11



Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.

YouTube Clip: Jonah at the wicked city. <https://youtu.be/IPBq-VHI1524>

This is a wonderful, subversive, and humorous story, and one in which the entertainment potential (whales, worms, and repentant animals) should be shamelessly exploited, rather than held respectfully in check. It's really worthwhile briefly summarising the rest of the Jonah story, not taking for granted that everyone even knows the outline.

The multi-faith environment of the story is also useful for us in a culture in which Christianity does not dominate, though our faith has vital things to say, as bearers of God's word of love for all. Where these things may be stern or scary, we need look to Jesus rather than Jonah: every hard truth must be offered in love. Our expectations of being heard do not determine how worthwhile it is to speak.

Whales and worms aside, by far the most 'miraculous' aspect is that, without waiting either for the impending disaster, or for the religious conversion of the Ninevites, indiscriminate life-saving change for all creatures is embraced, to the disgust of the prophet of doom. The pagans of Nineveh get on with it.

God loves those who are messing up their world. Enough to throw them a lifeline they don't understand, but grab hold of anyway.

The Book of Jonah speaks powerfully to the institutional inertia of our churches and governments in the face of continuing climate emergency, and indeed, following the 'sackcloth and ashes' of lockdown.

The humblest creation is on side with God, who 'ordains' the worm to do its stuff and deprive Jonah's arrogant despair of its shelter.

The God presented in the Book of Jonah presides over a world in which disasters are both possible and avoidable. This is no peevish tyrant, nor should we see any such thing in 'natural' disasters. Saving life - including animal life - is more vital than getting things right, or even than right belief.

So every suggested, large, or small, response of churches to climate and environmental emergency is for the good of all, seeking the will of God, which is also for the health of beloved Creation, in which our species has never played a neutral role.

And if, for now we have been Jonahs, well, the patient but firm nudging of God, for a prophet who has done their job, but can't cope with the outcome - this is for us!

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Psalm 145.1-8



Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.

Whilst stocking up on the awe and wonder of Creation, we also learn that the 'blame game' is not the choice of those who would ingratiate themselves with God, whose majesty is made all the more evident by his neglect of knee-jerk retributive fervour, for God is "slow to anger", and this very slowness is a sign of strength.

In an age of climate emergency, and following on from the virus crisis, finding a culprit and taking it out on them should be one of the many luxuries we set aside.

God is referred to as 'King', which, like 'father' brings some problems, given the miserable Old Testament experience of human 'kings like those of other nations'. [Samuel Chapter 8]. Given Jesus' critique of 'the rulers of the gentiles' [Mark 10:42, Matthew 20:25] should we consider whether this form of address is one which is worthy only for God? And what might be the implications for what human rulers should aspire to live up to? The absolute dictators of Europe culture in recent centuries are in any case, a travesty of the accountable, 'shepherding' ideal of biblical kingship.

The singer of the psalm clearly derives great personal benefit from the regularity of the praise they offer. They are not diminished by acknowledging God's greatness, indeed the contrary seems to be the case. Claiming our place and purpose, ourselves, as word and acts of God, grants dignity.

This is enhanced as they join in the chorus of Creation (marvellous works themselves) and God's action for justice. It is noted that this is worthy not only of led and immediate praise, but also of pondering, thought, discernment.

Over and above the thrill of the beautiful words, how is their power and the benefit they bring to sink in and do its work on our lives?

God is 'big enough' to be compassionate. Jesus says we can be likewise. (Luke 6:36). The multi-generational scope of the Psalm begs the question of our responsibility for those generations to come: will we have been seen to praise God in our care of Creation?

In the 500 congregations of EcoCongregation Scotland as a movement, the love of children and grandchildren has been a powerful motivator for change of lifestyle and outlook, for speaking out, and indeed, for whatever action lies within our power to care. This comes always with global justice and concern for human poverty, never separate from the Creation of which we are part.

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Philippians 1.21–30



Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.

Paul's apparently morbid fixation on 'getting away to a better place' is a ruse to express the depth and value of living your life right now in hope and in justice. Living - the more demanding option - is "Christ".

Nonetheless, the intense and relaxed consciousness of mortality adds a valuable corrective and urgency to our unwillingness to contemplate the fragility of the world - further corrected by the realisation that, within our own lifetimes, we will not be able to solve every problem. Back in the Garden of Eden, the most damaging lie told by the snake was "you will not die". But the point is not to live, unchanging, for ever. In whatever time is given to us, the contribution we do make, known or unknown to the world, will be valued by God.

We should also be cautious about the 'privilege of suffering'. The gift is not in pain, but in solidarity: we more readily face the often unavoidable trials of our lives upheld by the prayerful support of others. Togetherness also mitigates against intimidation, and many churches' experience this year of a very real togetherness despite lockdown and separation, chimes with that of Paul and his friends. We have discovered that relationships conveyed 'virtually' are nonetheless real. Prayer has long been a medium of relationship, supported by the letters, emails, or whatever else, that hold our communities together.

Finally, Paul is never under any illusion either of his own value or the dependence of that value on the support of others. In the EcoCongregation movement, we have had to address the problem of humility with regard to the visibility of good and encouraging church initiatives: boasting, of the sort Paul encourages, certainly has its place" letting our light shine before others "(Matthew 5:16) "so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

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Matthew 20.1–16



Hannah Brown.

Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer for the Joint Public Issues Team. (In which the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church consider matters of justice and peace).

Scripture passage overview

Like many of Jesus' parables, the story of the workers in the vineyard is offered as an example of what the 'kingdom of heaven' is like. This might be the kingdom of heaven in an 'afterlife', or the coming kingdom of heaven as envisioned for earth. If Jesus' teachings and actions in the gospels are anything to go by, it most likely offers us a glimpse of both.

Jesus tells the parable to the disciples when they are on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem. Two chapters before, in Matthew 18, the disciples have asked who is the 'greatest' in the kingdom of heaven. What they're asking is who has been deemed most *worthy* of reward from Jesus when he is in power.

The story Jesus tells in response often feels uncomfortable to listeners, as it probably did to the disciples when they first heard it. Exploring this passage together is about interrogating why it feels uncomfortable, and what we can learn from it.

In the parable, the landowner shows generosity and grace to those who arrive later to the work, paying them the same as the workers who arrived first. This paints an image of justice and righteousness that look different to conventional wisdom. For many justice is seen when reward is given in reflection of worthiness (much like the disciples show in their questioning). Good living is rewarded well, whereas disobeying God's commandments and living in a way which harms others is not.

However, in the story that Jesus tells, all are offered the same. God is generous with those whom we might deem undeserving. As Jesus tells the parable, he directly confronts the listener's understanding of righteousness.

The parable does not say anything about the why the labourers who are hired later haven't been hired by others already. Whilst we often make the judgement that the workers who arrive later are less worthy of good treatment – because they have done less work - they could as easily be lazy as they could be the victims of a recession, or a local labour oversupply. Either way, Jesus does not offer this judgement. Neither is there a judgement about why those who are hired first are offered work. The parable makes no judgement as to how deserving any of the labourers are.

Furthermore, no one is disadvantaged by the fact that everyone gets paid the same amount. It is not as though there is a set pot of money available that is distributed evenly – no one loses out in order for everyone to benefit.

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Sermon ideas:

Rev Alex Mabbs:



URC Minister Brighthelm Centre, deeply involved, for many years, with environmental spirituality & issues.

Enough is Enough – Sermon Ideas for Week 3 of Creation Time (20/9/20)

Three of today's readings (Exodus, Philippians and Matthew) speak about contentment with what God provides. This is a very important idea for living well in and for Creation. So much harm has been done to the planet and its inhabitants because of the greed of the powerful minority, their discontent with what they have and their pursuit of endless growth. It is crucial to the flourishing of life on earth that we learn not simply to be content but to find joy in having enough.

"Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist." (Kenneth Boulding).

The dominant model of economics we have relies on endless growth and leads us into addiction to having more, either without factoring in the impacts of waste or of limited resources or of injustice and exploitation, or regarding those negative impacts as a price worth paying for the sake of those who benefit.

Contrast this costly, dominant economic model with the model of God's economics that emerges from these readings. From Exodus 16.18: "Those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage." Or in the parable of the vineyard, where everyone is paid the same. Or Paul in Philippians, being content with whatever fate God provides (this is admittedly a bit weak for our purposes here; you might like to sneak ahead to 4.11-13). Or Jonah's intense self-interest, as he puts his pride and his well-being ahead of anyone else's.

You might like to ask how people feel about the parable of the vineyard. Do they feel that the workers were treated justly? Is it more just that each worker should receive an hourly rate, or that each should receive what they need to live on, i.e. a day's wage? What do you feel is God's view?

The idea of God providing enough for our daily needs is a frequent theme in scripture. The Lord's Prayer is an obvious example, but also see Psalms 145.15-17 and 104.14-15, 27-28. Matthew

5.43-48 shows how God's provision is based on grace and love rather than being earned. These passages see God's provision of food as something rooted in the natural order of Creation, and it is easy to see how this gracious provision of the needs of every creature is disrupted and damaged by privatisation of supply, commodification leading to price distortions, and hoarding. God's economics are based on love, generosity and abundance, compared to what drives the economics of our day: fear of scarcity, greed and the movement of wealth from the poor (and not only human poor) to the rich.

How can Christians live by the economics of God's kingdom?

What are some practical things we can do to change our behaviour and our attitudes?

Further research:

Green Christian's 'Joy in Enough' project: <https://joyinenough.org/>

Kate Raworth on 'Doughnut Economics': https://www.ted.com/talks/kate_raworth_a_healthy_economy_should_be_designed_to_thrive_not_grow

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MUSIC AND PRAISE

It is likely that your regular hymnbook or source will have an index relating to scripture. These suggestions, including a new hymn poem each week, should supplement such resources. Bear in mind, that within the framework of environmentally aware worship, not every item may need to explicitly mention trees, earth, soil, etc, though an introduction, explaining to a congregation that “world” really does mean “the whole world/living creation” may often be helpful.

The setting and presentation of worship will help “bells ring” for congregations as they discover the deep immersion of the language of faith and scripture in our partnership with Creation whilst also being part of Creation. Allow for surprise and delight that this also includes older and traditional hymns.

1) *All things bright and beautiful* by Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895)

An enduringly popular hymn, no longer presented with the verse that seemed (but didn't intend) to reinforce social hierarchy. Use this to remind congregations that our faith really is deeply environmental. And always has been, even when we tried to pretend otherwise.

Source, e.g. CH4 137

2) *We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land*, b Matthias Claudius 1740-1815, English by Jane Montgomery Campbell (1817-1878)

The English translation from the German 'Wir pflügen' toned down the all-encompassing scope of a hymn for everything that has breath and our participation in the project of the earth's fruitfulness, but it still lifts spirits, and if your harvest celebration doesn't become a time to express love and concern for the planet, what will?

Source, e.g. CH4 229

3) *Almighty father of all things that be*, by Ernest Dugmore, 1843-1925

Another high-octane, majestic hymn: the first line does much of the work: God, not merely as a father of humanity, but of 'all things that be.' The "weariness of the Earth" noted as human responsibility.

Source e.g. CH4 497

4) *Fill your hearts with joy and gladness*, by Timothy Dudley-Smith (b 1926).

A harvest hymn, with plenty of use at other times too. It does not run the common risk of presenting the Earth as property made over to us, but evokes praise to God at what we can see and enjoy.

Source: e.g. CH4 103

5) *Where are the voices for the earth?* by Shirley Erena Murray

The theme is obvious, and this should work all the more powerfully when combined with some of the exultant traditional hymns above.

Source e.g. CH4 224

New writing: Hymn poem.

Deep our longing to dwell with you

("You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Augustine.)
-That resting begins with life lived here and now through trust in Christ.

Tune: 878787 e.g. Westminster Abbey (CH4 200)

1) Deep our longing to dwell with you
Christ our risen, present, Friend:
Gawping up to boundless heavens
choosing not to comprehend;
that where need, injustice, threaten,
yours are hands that reach for aid.

2) You rejoice in flesh as Jesus;
share the blood, the breath the clay:
building blocks of cells and bodies;
vibrantly entwined today.
Neighbours' needs in many species
constantly your face display.

3) We deceive ourselves, if loving
"god" at cost of blessed Earth.
Food and drink and warmth and loving,
Tears and joy and death and birth;
All we need to live in your House:
Here and now: Christ offers worth.

4) Jesus taught the prayer converging
"World-as-is" with "Earth-to-be";
Love, without exception; justice
wise compassion, debtors free.
Not deserving; just responding
grants God's solidarity