



season of creation creation time creationtide

with



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‘Green Starters’

Short, sharp first thoughts to
trace the green thread running
through all the lectionary
passages during the Season of
Creation



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WEEK 1

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

The collected 'wisdom' which was intended to guide the leaders of God's people in the 'Proverbs' highlights the connection between injustice and what follows.

To deny climate crisis or minimise its effects is asking for trouble which **will** catch up with the unjust, though the tragic experience both then and now, is that the poor and vulnerable -as also the land itself -are hit first.

The agricultural imagery is not incidental: 'unjust sowing' touches on the inevitable harm to vulnerable creatures, human or otherwise. Likewise: appropriate sowing/ planting: the right trees in the right places. Even the valuable carbon-sink wet-lands become carbon-positive when trees are indiscriminately added.

But God is on the side of those who suffer.

Psalm 125

The Psalmist looks to the personalities of the landscape, with an overt personification of the hills and our expectations of them.

Are we like the hills who stand firm rather than turn aside? -

THOUGH - nothing we expect to be permanent is completely resilient or invulnerable. It is a measure of the crisis that proverbially resilient patterns and topography - even the 'heavens' - are themselves threatened.

We should read very carefully whenever "forever" is mentioned. 'In perpetuity' here retains a hint of '*for as long as needed*', and the damage we now witness to

cycles and landscapes which, even for the Psalmist, seemed *as good as* permanent should alert us to the urgency of prayer and action in response to climate crisis.

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Vengeance is the prerogative of God, though we may long for it or suffer from those who perceive it as their right against us. God's wrath/vengeance is not fantasy, but known in cause and effect of unjust action/inaction.

The unexpected prosperity - perhaps of creatures who benefit from what hurts us - may drive home the futility of greed and injustice as a way of life, even when we keep these aspects out of sight, out of mind.

Psalm 146

A consideration of faith built on the unexpected resilience of whoever and whatever owns up to their own fragility and vulnerability.

Creation is not mentioned without a hefty proclamation of justice for all life.

Human justice is always connected with 'climate justice'.

We really don't have to work hard with this Psalm, for that to be obvious: it is God "Who made sky and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;"

Epistle James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17

A strongly-worded chance to consider how we treat life as we encounter fellow creatures.

The rich and privileged are inevitably the ones whose impact/footprint is always greatest. Even if they might be unaware of this, or believe they are kind and generous. We might recall Jesus' comment that 'from those to whom much is given, much is expected'.

Do we make demands of the poor first of all, when the rich could lead the way? How do we hold to account those (including ourselves) who live unmindful of

their impact ? And how can any Christian ‘mission’, with any integrity at all, disregard, evade, or obscure environmental responsibility?

Would it be such a strange thing to impute “honour to the poor” - perhaps in listening respectfully to the witness of the ‘Small Island States’ at COP this November ?

Mark 7:24-37

A passage with much for the theologically squeamish to get over! There are powerful overtones of ethnic hatred and prejudice. ‘Dog’ is definitely an insult. And although Jesus certainly does not embody power and authority, a vulnerable woman approaches for help a man from a community at odds with hers.

If there is a “demon” at large, both here and in our churches, perhaps it is the demon of internalised oppression, or the illusion that the help we ourselves might offer is of no value. This is the demon that Jesus bluntly meets head on. More hesitant or cautious challenging of what holds us back from action and commitment may have less significant results.

We also note that Jesus’ healings are never either passive or imposed without consent: they come about through active interaction with the person or ‘bubble’ or community concerned.



WEEK 2

Proverbs 1:20-33

Lady Wisdom puts her product on the open market. The smug complacency of climate denial, including fobbing off by greenwashing or incrementalism (doing just something to be seen to be doing something, with no real intention of grasping the magnitude of necessary and costly change) is the preserve of “fools”, who need to be called out as such. Fools to-

day are people who, when warned, do not act on the science of warnings from the state of the planet, let alone the increase in reports of deadly freak weather.

A politeness which fails to challenge, and which maintains genteel barriers to the impact of the truth, does no one any favours.

An emergency may be the appropriate time for language which would otherwise - rightly- be considered “immoderate”.

“For ...the complacency of fools destroys them;”

Psalm 19

The variety of different interpretations of the language of this Psalm is instructive.

Anthropocentric approaches (where only the human perspective matters) make a non-sense of it.

The non-human players of Creation communicate, act, enjoy the life which is their own.

Only by acknowledging their sentience and personhood will we even begin to find our own place and purpose in the community and communion of Creation.

The poetry tells the truth: that Creation declares the glory of God, without having to put it in human terms. It is no quieter or less obvious for that.

How can we ignore their voice?

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Isaiah encourages and acknowledges the effort and personal cost of convincing those who complacently persist in unjust living.

But in amongst his brave and foolish determination is the recognition of the need for collaboration, and reliance on the grace of God.

Environmental campaigners and activists are seldom in charge, but “Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together!” Jesus found, in this approach, a model for his own life and costly commitment, and the Church has been pleased to make the connection.

Psalm 116:1-8

A Psalm to acknowledge crisis and promote spiritual resilience without the illusion of a ‘quick fix’. The appeal to God sustains life in difficult circumstances.

James 3:1-12

A potentially dangerous and discouraging message - though that is clearly not its intention. Nonetheless, in days of fake news, and these with which unintended gross misinformation can continue its disruptive work at the touch of a 'forward/share' button on a phone or computer screen, this is a caution to sift and test both what we hear and what we promote.

Lies and half-truths to minimise or evade the climate crisis may be very attractively packaged. It's very easy to end up on the wrong side of history through outrage at the supposedly undeserved mercies extended to those who are already suffering: refugees, and those whose homelands are already subject to drought and salt water inundation.

Is it wise or reasonable for a government to postpone aid to poorer countries until such time as its own economy has emerged from the impact of COVID?

Above all the very real danger of denial/evasion can be seen here. And the very real responsibility of anyone who speaks about anything to do with justice and the integrity of Creation. Action is not just for others.

Mark 8:27-38

Another very dangerous passage if 'traditionally' read. You **are** -and don't squirm - God's gift to Creation. This is not to be denied, nor your varied abilities, experiences and wisdom. Your self needs cherishing if you are to be what you can be.

It is selfishness, self-centredness, and the hoarding of what you are that is to be renounced, not the denial of what you may be for other people and the world. Never let "deny yourself" be used as a tool of oppression, to keep people (historically women in particular) down. Affirm yourself, deny selfishness.

Jesus is characteristically uncompromising about the cost of Good News (-for every creature, cf Mark 16:15). We all face 'Satan' - the terribly reasonable, common-sense opposition to the radical change the world needs in attitudes and lifestyles, both in ourselves and others. Jesus is the one who calls this out.

A humbling experience of environmental preaching is when hearers agree with what is shared, but feel they dare not put it clearly enough to be shared, because their own audience, they fear, will not cope.

A final point - be encouraged, not constrained by the great figures of the past. Let Jesus be Jesus, rather than John or Elijah. Let yourself be who you are, not your illustrious ancestor or overbearing mentor. Once more: Affirm yourself, deny selfishness!



WEEK 3

Proverbs 31:10-31

A passage that, on first reading, made me despair of finding the green thread. And yet, as a minimum, this passage looks to living **a good life with available resources.**

The “capable wife” would be part of a circular economy campaign, attending or running zero-waste classes, instructing the young from the throwaway generation in making do and mending. I’m reminded of how spiritually significant a darned sock or a patched sleeve is, in putting a different point of view, even in a culture very different from the one which this was aimed at. Read this popular passage in its own right, then see what can be recycled and repurposed.

Psalm 1

Some beautiful imagery of the inherent wisdom of trees in what also risks being a bit of a smug poem at first hearing. Perhaps we need reminding never to delight in the downfall of the wicked, but rather, out of love, to be sufficiently irritating to

make sure that friends and neighbours (who hope ‘climate change’ will either just go away or be quick-fixed by those who know better) do not escape the chance to know of the need for far-reaching change in every aspect of life.

Remember, the first word, and the aim of this Psalm is “Happy”.

Jeremiah 11:18-20

A cry of pain, which we would not wish on anyone. With the stark imagery of the prophet as a tree, needing to bear nourishing fruit.

In commending to the churches the cause of climate prayer and action, there will be opposition. Within the URC, when disinvestment was discussed, the arguments were long and hard, sometimes well-informed, sometimes not.

The outcome of a unanimous decision was nonetheless a great blessing. We need to convince, not to defeat, and pray for those whose deep commitment costs them dear in freedom and resources.

And pray we do not sink to the level of wishing even on those who oppose us any “retribution” other than a change of mind.

When we defeat, then we lose. When we convince - or are convinced - then all may win.

Psalm 54

Another raw, uncensored, vindictive psalm, whose value is in its emotional realism.

There is hurt, bargaining, the recourse to God as vindicator and avenger.

Though maybe this could be read ***in the voice of the Earth*** as a whole: “The arrogant have risen up against me and sought my life” fits tragically well with the attitude of governments and corporations which persist in the exploration of new oil and gas fields when fully to exploit those already on-stream takes us -at least- to the brink of climate disaster.

The newly accessible oil-bearing territories in the arctic circle, exposed by the alarming retreat of glaciers, are a case in point. Will they be protected, or add to the already over-drawn 'carbon budget' of the planet?

The Earth, of course, will survive, one way or another, what humankind perpetrates against both our own kind and the existing species and habitats of the Earth.

But human beings are meant to ensure Earth's health and flourishing, rather than mere survival. We too enrich - or can enrich - the flourishing of life on Earth.

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

Although none of us has time or the resources completely to put our own house in order, there's no escaping from the power that is added to our message by efforts and aspirations to embody in our own lives what we believe is necessary for humankind and the planet. A mid-way struggle to be green can look like lazy hypocrisy, undermining the message of change.

Not that I cherish my inadequacies and imperfections, environmentally, simply because they render me less remote.

Encouraging others to outdo myself may sometimes be the best I can manage, but the **cycle** of encouragement changes minds and cultures.

Even the advent of greenwashing, that widespread deceptive practice whereby products and services are given the gloss of environmental friendliness, is a sign of hope, that a 'bad conscience' about our unsustainable lifestyle is beginning to take hold.

Still call that out, though, as arrant hypocrisy!

Mark 9:30-37

The more we identify as committed to Christ, and indeed, committed to care and partnership with Creation, the greater the inhibition that kicks in, with embarrassment about what we don't know and can't do.

Christ's disciples "*did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.*"

Are we afraid, even to pray what we're afraid of?

We can always Google, though that does require considerable skill in sifting, and wariness about the outrageously fake science that we're liable to trip over in searching for what it seems we need to know.

The story about the child is not just quaint.

The level of maturity needed to be open about our almost complete ignorance of a global situation that few of us fully grasp, and yet which we're still called wholeheartedly to embrace, is one Jesus expounds with the help of the child.

The leadership of young people internationally, from Greta to the other Climate Strikers is a gift which severely challenges the most 'sensible' of grown-ups. All credit to the churches who made available premises for these actions, and for visiting pilgrims around COP. Welcoming such 'children' in Christ's name.



WEEK 4

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

No one needs to work too hard on this passage when there are others available. As a minimum, it is a tale of the craftiness required from those lacking determinative power. Jesus asks us elsewhere [Matthew 10:16] to be as gentle as doves and as crafty as snakes. It's part of the situation of EcoCongregation Scotland and JPIT that we *are not in charge*, though our strategic intervention may yet make a difference,

enriching the faith and integrity of our churches in the years of turmoil ahead.

Psalm 124

A psalm looking back for encouragement. Again, handle with care: by the grace of God, we got through the last several 'ends of the world', wars and natural disasters .

It's not just the malice of fellow human beings that opposes our life, but also the cruel determination of a nature that does want to eat you. It's reasonable to intervene in processes of nature, like COVID which endanger life.

I hope and pray that, looking back, we make the most of the experiences of the last two years. There is some emotionally rational encouragement to be had from reflection on what you have come through, on "still being here", be it as a declining church which against all odds continues their mission, or someone with cancer who has lived well just one more day.

The positive, 'palliative' approach to spiritual resilience in the face of climate crisis, that isn't going to go away in a hurry, may bring joy and something akin to healing of the distress, and lament that might otherwise overwhelm us.

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

"If only we had cheap petrol for our cars....

Leaving aside Moses' shockingly masculine dismissal of the demands of child-care, it's instructive to consider what recourse is open to leaders who might be at their wits' end. Is that you? Or a leader you know, and support?

The de facto leaders of a congregation, in awareness of climate crisis and readiness to lead and pay for the repurposing of the life of the church, may often feel isolated and overwhelmed. They may either be the official leaders : ministers, priests, pastors - or simply the pensioner or child through whom God has given a lead.

Don't be alone. Don't think it's only for you to carry. Don't burn out. Don't try to do everything. Not even everything green.

Change is for the benefit of all. Don't be afraid to **accept help**, even from someone unexpected.

And it's easy to underestimate the potential of those who seem to be digging in, because they're themselves in the final stages of coming round to the need for change.

Be an irritating friend (cf Luke 11:5-8) and help them get there!

Psalm 19:7-14

What, for us, in this time of Climate Crisis, amounts to the **Law of the Lord?** Torah, in ancient Israel and Judah, is not just what is written, but the moral will of God, to be discerned and often argued over.

The idea of the 'Big Book of God's works' and the 'Wee Book of God's Words' and their complementarity has been attributed to many scholars poets and prophets over the centuries. Charles Darwin was not too proud to suggest that true scholarship should not shrink from proficiency in both. [Origin of Species] The Law of the Lord, discerned through the Spirit in Scripture, which remains our guide, may point to this law in the workings of Creation, the cycle of oxygen, water, carbon and more.

What beauty there is in the rain and snow that comes down from the sky/heaven with a job to do! (cf Isaiah 55) .May it return through our praise and action!

James 5:13-20

Reasons to be cheerful? Already, from the earliest days of the church, we hear the message of the phenomenal resourcing of Christian community.

In EcoCongregation Scotland, we receive many request for 'resources', though it's likely the best we can do is to bring down from the mantle shelf the treasures of Christian life, love teaching and spirituality, most of which arose in times of threat, uncertainty or oppression.

We don't have time to 'reinvent' the Church. Why are we worried or hesitant to reuse, recycle, repurpose our Christian Communities? And the best of Christian witness. In Granton, [<https://grantongoesgreener.org.uk>] the church led schemes to 'feed the hungry' (reducing their carbon footprint by getting food which would otherwise be thrown away) and clothe those in need (with a swap-shop for clothing which respected the dignity of those who used it) gaining carbon-offsetting credit for these mainstream Christian activities.

The good stuff, like Fairtrade and make-do-and-mend will often belong together. One minister was worried that it was 'the same people who were into fair trade, that formed the green group'. No surprise there.

And even those who've gone astray can be 'recycled'. Zero waste with people too! (cf Matt 18:17, illuminated by Jesus' own treatment of these people).

Don't worry, be happy! After all the measures you've taken against infection, let joy be the one thing that really spreads!

Mark 9:38-50

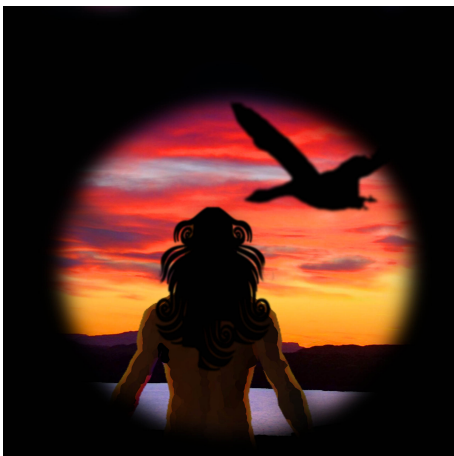
There's little I could add to the deep wisdom of acknowledging that those who are not against us are for us.

Environmental concern may offer many strange bedfellows. Jesus was not fussy when people showed any inclination in the direction of justice. Encouragement is more economical than condemnation, and perhaps only amongst those who have become friends can we productively call a spade a spade.

And reward: it does us good to do good: just make sure that the actions and commitments your congregation chooses are rewarding (and preferably enjoyable). You may be surprised at the fellowship of a litter-pick or beach-clean.

And stumbling-blocks: Delight in whatever first steps look like leading on to walking and running in a life in partnership with Creation.

Finally - **and consciously to stretch a point** - English translations of verse 42 allow us to see the enthusiastic beginners who drive out demons in Jesus' name, even though the disciples try to stop them in the same light as those other beginners: the children whom the disciples likewise try to repel. We have every cause to value the positive contribution of those who don't quite see things the way we do.



WEEK 5

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

Perhaps one of the most difficult books just to sit and read on your own, Job provides perhaps the most profound meditation on our place in a Creation, the man-

agement of which is God's agenda over and above our individual needs. Of these, God nonetheless, turns out at least to be mindful.

Later in the book, the conventional status-quo wisdom of Job's denialist comforters - rationalising disaster without bothering to look at the facts - is set against the witness of Creation as to the power and authority of God.

We live, nonetheless, in an age when the natural resilience that the Book of Job appeals to is in question: Because the sky, and the climate are an aspect of 'heaven' in a biblical view, even heaven is endangered in our time. Integrity wins out, though we're also confronted with the fact that God does not 'restore'. The final prosperity of Job follows the complete and irretrievable loss of the people and property in which he previously delighted. What is lost, in the harm already done to the Earth, will not be 'brought back'. Even resurrection is not resuscitation. We go on, in hope, for a better life, not back to any "Paradise" already extinct.

Psalm 26

Perhaps not the most admirable approach: "Look what a good boy/girl I've been!" And yet the singer of this Psalm has the courage to be honest about the goodness that has characterised their life. In the chaplain visits of EcoCongregation Scotland we struggle to persuade churches doing wonderful things to sing and shout and share them: to receive the just reward of rewardingness. Of course we're feeble, fallible, failing, but there's joy in having a go, and Jesus asks his followers to let the good they do be seen, that others may praise our father in Heaven.

Genesis 2:18-24

A foundational passage in so many ways: both in the wholeness we find in human relationships and in our God-given role of naming. During your life, you may have the honour of naming another human being as well as, perhaps, a domestic pet or companion animal. Giving names is so different from classification or putting in boxes. Names are the beginning of relationship and partnership. A name is for a fellow creature you can look in the eye. A label allows you to dismiss them. for the Earth and their creatures, endeavour only to have Names.

Psalm 8

The Outstanding Creation Psalm, exalting both the dignity and humility of humankind also emphasises our hands-on responsibility. In a way, the Psalm answers its own question: why is God mindful of us - well, who is it that has been given, collectively, such disruptive or pastoral care over other forms of life?

We're also well advised to listen for the voices of the marginalised, of the young people no one bothered to listen to, though whom God's leadership is expressed in our time .

Go carefully too, with what role is assigned to human beings. [v6]. Older translations may include the idea of '**dominion**' - "putting all things under our feet." Don't be afraid of it, as it does imply an active role of wise intervention, rather than standing back and pretending we don't make any difference. As with its occurrence in Genesis 1:26, this needs to be recognised as 'rule' in the very best sense of responsibility for care, informed by justice. No ancient king would wish to be seen as other than just, responsible and accountable to God.

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

A great candidate for recycling and repurposing : this passage is one provided for times which, like ours, have something of a feel of the 'last days' about them. The sustaining power of a God insisting on partnership with people in the care of the rest of Creation. Christians getting bogged down in an undue reliance on Genesis 1 and 2 should note the affirmation of the complete involvement of **Christ** in the life of the Earth. I'm worried by any suggestion that 'nothing is outside our control', and this may be a case for 'further study needed. Humanity is in a position to harm everything on Earth, whether through nuclear weapons or the accumulation of plastics even in the deepest and remotest of places, but we can also work with the cycles of the planet for harmony and fruitfulness. Complete control - and the right to exercise it without recourse to God's guidance, or the constraints of justice - remains the most deadly of self-deceptions.

Our recognition of the glory and responsibility that we share with the risen Christ is also worth shouting about. Christian motivation for environmental prayer and action should not be hidden or apologised for.

Mark 10:2-16

The disputed regulation of marriage: (who, how and when) has bogged down people of faith across the centuries. This passage is a minefield for going off on hurtful tangents without awareness of the predicament of a woman abandoned without protection or income in the society of Jesus' time. Our reading is hugely coloured by contemporary and traditional ideas of what the partnership of marriage might or might not amount to. It's a passage best attended to in a study group than a sermon. However...

Perhaps the pathway to Gospel here is Jesus' identification of 'hardness of heart'.

In the abusive relationship of humankind with the Earth, which is compounded by human-human injustice, the current state of the world is the result of hardness of heart. That's what we need to receive 'as a little child' rather than present that the adult-ish behaviour which has done such damage has anything normative about it at all.