CREATION TIME WEEK 2:

13TH SEPTEMBER:

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Rev’d Any Braunston is a URC minister, working with a group pastorate South of Glasgow.

Andy co-ordinates online ‘Daily Devotions’ for the United Reformed Church. This project grew hugely in scope during the ‘lockdown’ crisis this year. A DD audio service has been prepared for this Sunday.

Call To Worship

Creation eagerly yearns for the Day of the Lord when the sea will part again, the mountains skip like rams and the hills like young sheep.

Come, like the earth tremble at the presence of the Lord in this place; come to the one who drew forth water from the rock, who turned flint into a flowing stream. Come and hear truth – strange speech for our age – come and be transformed. Come.

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Pardon

O God of freedom
You led your people of old
with cloud by day and fire by night.
You parted the sea with your breath,
and saved Your people from oppression.
Free us, O God, in our own age.
From
…indifference in the face of poverty,
…ignorance in the face of fact,
…disbelief in the face of evidence before our very eyes,
deliver us good Lord,
that we may allow the earth to heal.

Lord of the living and Lord of the dead, we are conscious of our sin.
We are weak in faith, quarrelsome in nature and there is no health in us.

When we deny the science of climate change, enlighten us.
When we continue to pollute our earth, convict us.
When we exploit Creation, chastise us.
When we fail to cherish – the Earth, our fragile home change us.
When we fail to love the poor and oppressed, forgive us.

Give us time, O God,
even at this late hour,
to change, to turn away from destruction and back to you.

pause

God is the fount of all mercy
and through the life, death, and new life of Jesus Christ has shown us how to live
calling us to renewed action and commitment.
Through the ministry of the Church may you receive pardon, peace, and wisdom,
that you may use your time well,
be filled with grace,
and help to renew the earth. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination

Spirit of God,
who danced at Creation’s birth,
dance with us now,
as we hear the Word read and proclaimed,
that we may be changed, renewed and empowered for mission,
Amen.

Blessing
May the One to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue praise, enfold you in loving kindness.

May the One who was nailed to a tree for challenging the powers, give you grace to challenge the lies of this age.

May the One who sustains Creation inspire such love in you, that you remain unsatisfied until the Earth is healed.

And may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love now and always
Amen.

or

And may the blessing of Almighty God, the Triune God, be with you and all whom you love now and always
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 14.19–31

Mike Mineter
Mike is a Roman Catholic, a member of the Iona Community; passionate about connecting with wilderness, as a grounded sea kayaker he is now giving overdue attention to his garden. He works as an expert in computing for climate research at the University of Edinburgh.

I write this on Holy Saturday 2020. Tonight in the Roman Catholic liturgy of the Easter Vigil we read this passage of the exodus of the Israelites from plague-ravaged Egypt. A foundational story for Jews, for Christians it prefigures that passover achieved by Christ in his death and resurrection. These events will be re-membered: proclaimed and our lives touched by their power. Yet I write, and fear you might be reading, in a plague-hit land, in which interdependence and communion is expressed by isolation.

Yesterday I listened to people from the West Bank and Gaza, who fear the COVID plague will tear through these territories. As I write, the fate of the Palestinians seems in the balance, and the balance is oppressively controlled by Israel. Themes in the Old Testament (including Jonah, unconventionally taken to Nineveh in Assyria), and above all Jesus’ life, show that although God’s relationship to the Jews is special, yet God’s love is for all. There is a huge new journey to be undertaken by the modern state of Israel to the only sustainable future: justice for all. It requires miracles that might dwarf the parting of the Red Sea in changing hearts and minds of those determining and defending its policies. As Christians shouldn’t we be helping miracles to happen, offering our own seemingly tiny loaves and fish?

In the UK, and world-wide, humanity has similar journeys of transition to make, to reach a promised land sustainable for us all. At this time of COVID it is the poorest in society, and those who selflessly serve, who are the ones who suffer so terribly, crucified in part by political choices over years.

There is a promised land, whose outline we can begin to discern against the storm clouds. We live in a world of plenty – of enough for all, but there will never be enough for all to prosper if the greedy and power-seekers determine who is chosen and whom dehumanised. COVID is far from the first disease to emerge from distorted relationships with creation. As with pollution and greenhouse gases, short term profiteering by a few endangers us all.
May I ask:

What outline of a promised land and what directions of fruitful travel do you see as you look at the world and its crises?

What threatens to engulf us as we move in those directions?

Where do you see the Spirit acting and beckoning us?

As the Bethlehemites said in webcast seminars, “We might feel hopeless, but Easter gives hope for a better future. Hope grows when we come together.” Easter is not a festival that comes and goes once a year, but the life-giving mystery at the heart of what it is to be human, at the heart of what it is to be a creature as part of this beautiful Earth.

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Psalm 114

Dr Eleanor Harris is a member of the Choir of St John’s, Edinburgh; an environmental professional working in the forestry industry; and a historian of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

I’m not a preacher, I’m a chorister. My encounter with scripture is singing it, or framing its reading with music. Each Sunday, matins and evensong, we gather to sing psalms. We smirk at the couthy, grotesque phraseology of Hebrew poetry mediated through Myles Coverdale. We’re born and rooted not into a tradition Christ initiated, but one he too was born into. I’m Christ’s psalm-sister.

Singing psalms puts words to a faith beyond the cerebral. I can discuss the bible; I can sing music where words are incidental; but only sung psalms are words from the heart. I didn’t know this until I suffered a serious bereavement, when I found that the only words which articulated what I was feeling were the psalms: words I’d sung for decades wondering why we sung this weird sh*t. They waited for me.

The psalms don’t teach, explain or reveal, as we ordinarily understand these words. When you sing the psalms, you voice the emotions of someone who lived 2,500 years ago. Just occasionally,
right psalm, right day, your emotions are in spine-tingling unison, and you sing together across the millennia.

Psalm 114 is an extra spine-tingler for me because I remember how it is sung to *Tonus Perigrinus*. Whereas most of our psalm tunes were written in the past 400 years, the tradition is that *Tonus Perigrinus* was a Jewish tune, which Christians just kept singing.¹ Christ might have sung it.

And it has this marvellous stuff about nature.

In many psalms, the psalmist addresses nature as a co-worshipper. I built our church’s environmental programme, ‘earth be glad’, around Psalm 96, an elemental chorus about divine justice on earth.

I’ve usually heard these nature psalms interpreted as wonderful imagery or metaphor, but this seems unsatisfactory to me. It assumes anthropocentrism and then finds it in scripture, rather than taking scripture at face value: ‘obviously we know mountains don’t really worship, so the psalmist must not really have meant it.’

What I understand, singing this psalmist’s words, is that Humanity is inextricably, divinely linked with Nature (not just biological but also geological Nature), as it fled, leapt, turned back, trembled, and did it again. I understand the psalmist is saying nature and humans to share the same grace, just as I believe the writers of Romans 8.19 and John 3.16 did.

But I also believe these writers all knew, with the modern environmentalist, that this is the anthropocene. The human species has become so dominant, for good or ill, that a political event can re-shape ecology as much as an ice age. Anthropocene effects were already apparent in Holy Land ecology by the time the psalms were written.

We face global crisis, of human causing. The responsibility is overwhelming: the earth needs ‘saving’, but can be only through the ‘salvation’ of the human species. Singing the psalms won’t tell us what to do; but joins us to a cloud of witnesses who have been articulating this for 2,500 years.

Is psalm-singing relevant in the middle of climate change and extinction? I don’t know — but it is to me.

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Exodus 15.1b–11, 21b

Rev David Coleman,

EcoChaplain EcoCongregation Scotland.

The song of Miriam, the cruel glee of the redeemed powerless, brings us emotional truth, even if it’s not hugely admirable.

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¹ Its origins are lost in the mist of time, but there is enough evidence to give this tradition weight. See Lundberg 2004, Historiographical problems of the Tonus Perigrinus, Mattias Olof Lundberg, https://www.biu.ac.il/hu/mu/min-ad04/PER-EGRINE.pdf
In this poetic passage, injustice comes up against Creation-in-partnership-with-God. We’re given an exultant song of triumph recalling the ‘Great Acts’ of God, and the closeness of injustice and avoidable ‘natural’ disaster (which we see right the way through the ‘plagues’ narrative of Exodus).

The forces of nature are shown in uproar against complacent power and oppression.

It isn’t that Nature is identical with God, but rather, they ‘sing from the same hymn-sheet’, and the forces of cause and effect seem to ‘punish’, on God’s behalf, those who abuse their power as humans, to shape and ‘rule’ Creation.

Natural forces, likewise, provide the antidote to overweening pride and the determination to control, rather than collaborate.

It would not be helpful, in interpreting this passage, simply to try to “explain away” the incident it deals with as “natural forces”. The ‘song’ demands that we encounter Creation personally, and realise Nature will ‘have it in for us’ when we abuse and exploit.

Above all, it’s a song: and songs amplify joy, love, hatred, sadness ...and in this case, triumph. Songs are powerful, dangerous, and useful in building up communities.

Should we even try to read it calmly? Without tambourines?

Let’s leave aside for a moment - but not ignore or accept without reservations - the rather unattractive glorying in the downfall of others. Jesus, after all, asks us to respond with kindness and prayer to the outrages of our enemies, (Luke 6:27-8) and Paul synthesises feelings of revenge by means of the “burning coals” of kindness.(Romans 12:20), which also refer back to the ‘burning coals’ of Temple worship, making an offering to God. There is nothing of that here, and a congregation needs to be fully aware that Exodus (and the songbook of the Psalms) only become Christian Scripture when read through the ‘lens’ of Christ. Here, love for the Egyptians is not given house-room, though some traditions of Passover celebration acknowledge that it is also right to weep for the tragedy of your foes.

What is distinctively different here from the most frequent outcome in the world as we know it, is that the oppressors and perpetrators of injustice suffer, whereas the victims and the oppressed escape with the ‘booty’.

This, therefore, is a song of an authentic ‘miracle’ of justice, which therefore rightly combines awe and wonder at the power of nature with awe and wonder at the power, majesty, and justice of God, who can cope rather better with the temptations of victory.

Hubris - eventually- always harms those who give in to it. This passage showcases the sentiments that oppressors may expect at their downfall: it could as well be the song of the Earth when humanity has to face the consequences of exploitation. Is this what we want to hear?

And again, however powerful a human empire, Creation, in partnership with God, ‘executes justice.’
Genesis 50.15–21

Rev David Coleman,

EcoChaplain EcoCongregation Scotland.

Our very practical habit of scooping a passage out of the river of scripture sometimes results in a caricature - a cardboard cut-out of what may be surprisingly complex characters handed on to us by the work of the scribes and storytellers of the Old Testament.

Although this part of Genesis has very mixed voices (including the glaring divine non-approval of Joseph’s shocking and exploitative enslavement of the starving Egyptians Gen 47), this also plays up to the greatness of mercy, and its triumph over vindictive justice. The mercy Joseph now shows acknowledges humbly the wisdom and mercy of God.

Left to himself, Joseph might consider feeding his grudge, but since he defers to God, this is no longer an option. He gains credit from leaving the credit to God. There is no contradiction here.

The only “god” we play, when we “play God”, is not the God of love and mercy, or indeed, of justice, which is the gracious acknowledgement of need.

As we become aware, first of the magnitude of avoidable damage our fossil-fuel addicted culture has done to the Earth and to the victims of the wars and natural devastation that has resulted from that, then forgiveness, mercy, and a recognition of common humanity becomes not just ‘the right thing to do’, but ultimately, our only hope. Tables can be turned; complacency is a very poor friend.

The miserable duplicity of the brothers, who seemingly invent a ‘last wish’ of their father for forgiveness is made irrelevant: they have deviously conspired to bring to mind what ought nonetheless to be obvious: reconciliation sets the scene for survival, survival for reconciliation. The wellbeing of all is more important than that every last misdemeanour is punished.

And if our churches have not drawn closer across the sectarian divide following the COVID crisis, what can we expect but judgment?

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Psalm 103.(1–7), 8–13

Rev David Coleman,

EcoChaplain EcoCongregation Scotland.

We cannot do justice to an experience of this text without making ourselves quite fully aware of its genre and purpose, in order to then discover what it has to offer us.
As a Psalm, it is part of the hymnbook of ancient Israel, and as such, part of a body that shaped -but perhaps did not absolutely determine - the spirituality of Jesus of Nazareth. It gave him words to express joys, fears and yearnings, even on the cross. He carried it with him, as we often carry the Lord’s prayer, even to our deathbed.

This is a richly spiritual song. Which is why, if we but look, it is in our savouring and cherishing of physical creation, that we find images to express - and recognise - our daily encounter with God.

This, then is a song, a creative poem, of praise, and of trust, with both the strengths and weaknesses of poetry. It is not a systematic textbook. Trust comes first of all, though emotionally powerful reasons to ground that praise and trust are also forthcoming.

Praise opens out in us an appreciation of all that we might otherwise overlook: every encouragement or liberation, large or small, without which our safety and joy, even such as it is, would not be known.

And this realisation can change us for the better: our own brows are readied for a taste of God’s own crown: not a crown of domination and control, but of “mercy and loving-kindness”. Praise is neither passive, nor neutral in its workings on those who praise.

‘All that is in me’? That's lots! Life, breath, experience, kinship with all other living creatures, a partnership, yes even at the molecular level, with the cycles of the planet. Can we conceive of all these things, so often described in clinical or lifeless terms, nonetheless praising God in their own way? We each become a choir, full of complex harmonies.

We might have ‘infirmities’ that doggedly refuse to ‘heal’, though in truth, our bodies are constantly at work to heal, even the minor cuts and scratches.

Note, however, also the closeness of moral and physical disease: “He forgives all your sins and heals all your infirmities” [v3]. This with the closeness, on a global scale, of injustice and environmental devastation. [cf Jeremiah 2:7 and many other prophetic sayings]

This Psalm aims to feed our awe and wonder, though not with the casually infinite. Earth, Heaven (always also meaning: ‘the sky’) and Earth, east and west, are contained within the limits and boundaries of Creation.

Finally, in consciousness of how many human fathers in the Old Testament make such a mess of their legacy (e.g. between Jacob and Esaw) verse 13 offers a best-case scenario for unconditional care and guidance. The children of a ‘father’ are his hope and his future. How can we live up to such trust and love?

And yet alongside praise hope and trust, ‘fear’ also finds a place in a right relationship, as presented by this ancient poet. Unwariness, complacency, and taking good things for granted will undo all the good. Your every choice matters. Be led by praise
"At first glance, the strategy used by Paul may shock the reader: the apostle speaks of "weak", which, implicitly, amounts to describing the community of Rome as consisting of "strong" and "weak". Are there strong and weak in Christianity? Let us not dwell too long on this. It seems to be a clever way for Paul to lead us into a reflection that will take us beyond divisions with mundane connotations.

Paul gives two examples of differing opinions: about food and about holy days.

The apostle points to two opposing approaches: the "strong" who eat everything and the "weak" who eat only vegetables. The strong would represent a majority of people who don’t care about eating any meat, even from animals sacrificed to Roman gods. The weak could represent Jews who have become Christians, who would like to continue to eat kosher, but who cannot because of Roman policy and therefore eat only vegetables. These weak ones would probably also include newly converted Christians, coming from philosophical and religious traditions that advocate vegetarianism. Paul presents the diversity of food choices in a radical way, between on the one hand those who would eat only vegetables and on the other hand those who would eat anything: two extreme cases that should provoke the reader, because they are both caricatures. In fact, no one eats strictly only greenery and no one really eats everything.

Concerning the religious calendar, a minority seems to want to respect certain sacred days, while the majority is indifferent to this.

Paul wants to put all these people in agreement on one point. It is essential for Christians that whatever they do, they do it for Christ, to whom they all belong. The apostle emphasises the welcome of others — hospitality is first.

In general, the apostle is very concerned about the unity of brothers and sisters. He wants the members of the communities to understand each other, to have the same thought (Philippians 2:2, Romans 15:5, etc.), and to be united before the Lord.
In order to interpret Paul's discourse properly and make his teaching fruitful for a Church today, it is important to understand that the Apostle is not asking the Christians of Rome to all have the same opinion. He is asking them not to arrogantly condemn or despise each other about opinions—a different matter altogether. In a spirit of unity and understanding, this leaves much room for debate among Christians, and we should welcome this sign, rather than worry about it.

During Creation Time, we can receive a powerful inspiration from this text. Indeed, opinions differ in the world and among Christians on what to do about pollution, global warming or the loss of biodiversity. Some believe that a ban on plastic straws is an important action, while others reasonably envisage an end to animal farming, fishing and oil. Like the community of Rome in the first century, it is important that Christians today do not condemn themselves on these opinions. On the contrary, they need to be debated within communities and, if some have the gift of prophecy, they should express what the spirit of God inspires them about His creation.

Matthew 18.21–35

Rev David Coleman,

EcoChaplain EcoCongregation Scotland.

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YouTube Clip: “The Theatre of Forgiveness” (2 mins)

https://youtu.be/z0imwu2bG7M

The sheer and compelling practicality of reconciliation, and all the methodologies we might adopt to accomplish it set in perspective not only the petty, but also the serious hurts that we choose to inflict on each other and the planet. Our complicity is universal; our friendliness to the environment, both laudable and relative.

We can choose to be so ‘right’ that we are wrong, underlined by Jesus comment Mark 10:18 “No one is good—except God alone.“

The last thing any environmentally aware preacher should want is a revival of smug piety: a ‘greener-than-thou’ excuse to look down on others and limit our willingness to understand them,
forgive them and, hardest of all, learn from them. If we seek a more faithful Christian/green way of life, faith and worship, then changing minds, including our own, will be more fruitful even than forgiving recurrent offences.

The ‘kingdom of heaven’ (- which we can read, for now, as ‘the way things ought to be - and well might be - whenever/wherever God’s will is done’) can only be described though the experiential medium of story, rather than the narrow-minded, statistically-based rules that Peter is hoping Jesus will give him.

How often will we fall into the trap that catches Peter? His negotiating position seems, perhaps, quite generous: to forgive seven times. But if we’re counting, then have we forgiven even once completely, rather than merely postponed unforgiveness “from our heart”. With the scary punchline that the also shoots ourselves in the foot.

Forgiveness is, however, only the first step towards reconciliation, and the transformation of relationships, which stands more chance of minimising re-offending than allowing that things stay as they are. Rather than closing down and writing off, in the stern teaching of Jesus, by the grace of God, our life is opened out. We are given permission, not to stop forgiving, but to be free to persevere. And it might also be the best for us to do so. We are accountable for our choices, but with every opportunity, each day, to choose a better world for others and for ourselves.

Sermon Outline:

Rev Jenny Adams:

Trustee of EcoCongregation Scotland,

and Church of Scotland Minister: Duffus, Spynie and Hope-man Parish Church,

Sermon ideas

Different perspectives

To explore how we judge others and ourselves it may help to hear some of these stories imagined from different perspectives. Ultimately we hope to see through God’s eyes, so we can follow God’s ways – it is God to whom we are accountable, and God who will understand and forgive our falling short.
Judgement/hypocrisy/accountability

Considering climate change, most people are open to charges of hypocrisy. Some observers seem to delight in finding inconsistencies in those trying hardest to reduce resource footprints, as if it lets the observer off the hook. With national policy, it is easy to find large gaps between declarations of climate emergency and actual urgent changes. The massive responses to Covid-19 raise questions about what can be possible with appropriate political will (though also highlight the consequences of such changes).

It has been said that the church is full of hypocrites, but there’s always room for more. We all fall short when we try to live in God’s ways, in creation care as in everything else. These different texts challenge how we deal with failings and hypocrisy, in ourselves or others.

The story of Exodus is very difficult: our other texts speak of forgiveness, reconciliation and liberation as God’s ways, but the Egyptians see none of those. The song of triumph at least owns the human tendency to be concerned for one’s own, which allows that to be questioned. Perceived hypocrisy and contradictions across different Bible stories are used as reasons to disregard God as a God of love, hope or transformation, so these can be worth exploring.

Hypocrisy is spelt out and judged most clearly in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 18, where it leads to destructive punishment rather than restorative forgiveness. Judgement of others’ actions, particularly if it leads to despising them, is rejected in Romans 14 and in Genesis 50.

A response to judgement of others, including of their hypocrisy, is accountability. Across these stories people are accountable to God for their actions, and how they affect nations (the Hebrew people), families (Joseph) and faith communities (Romans & Matthew). The Hebrew Bible readings also highlight that all of creation is a measure of God’s care (Psalm 103) and has a place in God’s actions, therefore we are also accountable for how we live as part of God’s creation.
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) Guide me o thou great Jehovah by ‘Pantecelyn’

The experience of being dependent on God in the wilderness - and not completely downcast is a sustaining one, evoked by this great hymn from Wales. Absolutely to be sung at maximum volume! or listen to it in the original Welsh: wow! Is the prospect of being a pilgrim in a ‘barren’ land now a wee bit scary?

Source: e.g. CH4 167.

2) Let all the world in every corner sing by George Herbert

Try introducing this with an emphasis on Creation’s praise of God, and the place of the mission of the Church, finding a place and purpose within it. ‘The church with Psalms must shout’ - the Psalms, of course, are full of Creation imagery
3) **Nourished by the rainfall**

Pablo Fernandez Badillo (b. 1949) English version John L. Bell (b. 1949). A song absolutely immersed in the partnership of Creation. The chorus affirms both the value of Creation and our active purpose within.

Source: e.g. CH4 122

4) **Hear me, dear Lord, by Colin Ferguson. (b. 1937)**

A very deep and moving prayer of confession, acknowledging the grace of God throughout the mess we have made, and the days ahead. An introduction to set this in the context of the human responsibility for climate emergency may enable the song to work powerfully. How can we honestly approach the climate emergency without the prospect of forgiveness?

Source: e.g. CH4 729

5) **Communion settings, e.g. James MacMillan**

If in the celebration of Holy Communion/Eucharist/the Lord’s Supper, where the elements of food and drink, which sustain us both spiritually and physically (not opposites!) are approached with greatest reverence, the ‘bells’ of recognition do not ring, then something is amiss. Whatever the church tradition, the holiness of Communion, where we encounter “heaven and earth, full of God’s glory” should not leave us other than deeply committed to the care of Creation. James MacMillan’s awe-inspiring, soaring setting is much loved well beyond his own Roman Catholic church.

Source: e.g. CH4 651, but look around.

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**New writing: Hymn poem.**

One day I said sorry out loud to the Earth

Forgiveness is one of the prime environmental issues. Here contemplating whether the Earth might forgive us for the damage we, as a species have done. The background is Matthew 18.21–35, the Gospel for week 2 of Creation Time this year. I’m also keen here to present a different po-
sition from the widespread but toxically negative “We are the virus with which the Earth is inf-
ected”. We should and can be a blessing for the planet.

11 11 11 11,
St Deinio /Stowey/ Columcille ( or 1st 4 lines of “Flow gently Sweet Afton” )

1) One day I said ‘sorry’, out loud, to the Earth.
I’m sorry I trampled each day since my birth.
And burned, tarred and wasted the gifts in my hands
And passed off my greed as my Father’s Commands.

2) “Dear child”, said the Earth, “Since God shaped from my clay
humanity - one with my creatures that play.
There’s much of delight, as you till and protect,
and bring forth great wonders, and love and respect.

3) But yes, for this moment, you’re way out of line:
in selfish employ of your talents and time;
with poverty even of three billion kin
I’ve shown you already the mess we’re all in.

4) You’ve hurt me: I lash out, but I keep no grudge
And God who shapes all of us judges the judge.
I just want the pain and extinction to stop
I couldn’t care less now, who comes out on top!"

5) “Earth longs to forgive you” - a voice: was it Christ?
“When debt’s written off, shackles are sacrificed.
Forgiveness frees debtors to dance and rejoice:
Change course: choose forgiveness: know, you still have choice!