

This week,

A week full of the implications for people of faith of living in times of injustice. Not forgetting that the climate crisis is the product of consciously chosen human actions.

All our God-given gifts of alertness, craftiness, and readiness to act are called for. The full repertoire of 'Christian character', especially for the powerless, comes into focus

Jeremiah 8 considers the harm that is done when we offer allegiance to 'gods' lacking love and concern for fellow creatures, human and otherwise.

The shocking tone of Psalm 79 helps us to wake up to the relation of politics, war and environment.

Historian **Dr Rosemary Power** gets to grips with the frequently misunderstood "fierce letter" [1 Timothy 2] which is certainly not written with the intent of creating of the church a harmless and compliant body, not daring to disagree with lies and injustice amongst the powerful.

Rev Julia Meason of Orkney provides prayers

*** A downloadable major video reflection on this week's readings (to complement or take the place of a sermon) will be available by late August

Scripture Passages: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1



(Rev David Coleman, ECS staff)

I'm full-time EcoChaplain with the the movement of nearly 600 congregations of all hues, which makes up EcoCongregation Scotland. I have no specific qualifications beyond those of an everyday, "general practice" pastoral leader, which is why I'm confident that within your churches, the job I'm trying to do can be picked up and run with by anyone, in any local situation, to whom we can give sufficient encouragement to trust the science and trust the gifts of their own church in study and discernment. I also know that this takes courage - and courage requires the support of a community. A leader can't lead without that foundation.

"Reading the signs of the times' [cf Luke 12:56] and trusting in the visionary guidance of the Holy Spirit, go together. We live in very different times from those in which some of the best-loved commentaries and translations of the Bible were written. Your own reflections and observations for today are what matter.

EcoChaplaincy is a combination of **Jeremiah** - the prophet of total and brutal social breakdown, such as some already confidently expect, (evident in the desperation of some environmental protests) and **Barnabus** [Acts 4] the Encourager.

How do we tell the alarming truth compellingly enough that people take what action they can before too many tipping-points are passed.

And how do we get the message across without exaggeration, that much damage is already done? How not to panic that climate crisis is with us for the rest of our lives? If Jeremiah records 'tears for the slain of **my** people', then we cannot ignore the casualties of polluted air, which even in the UK shortens tens of thousands of lives each year [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/air-pollution-applying-all-our-health/air-pollution-applying-all-our-health>] or of heatwaves, droughts and more than previously- frequent extreme weather already affecting most of the world.

This **does** have causes, and following Jeremiah's diagnosis, those causes are spiritual realities. This is recognised internationally by churches and other faith groups. As is our own place in encouraging change - see the Glasgow Multi-faith Declaration, to which I am -ex-officio- a signatory, alongside most mainstream Christian Scottish leaders, likely including those of your own church.

[<https://faithfortheclimate.org.uk/newsitem/The-Glasgow-Multi-faith-Declaration>]

For the **"worship of 'foreign idols'"**, read: every continuing determination to put profit before planet, and the cult of single-use, throwaway, endless growth, blocking re-use and transition with scare stories about the cost of change, rather than the hidden cost of a continuing "'suicidal war' on nature - [UN chief Antonio Guterres, December 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-55147647>] . And yet day by day, we may struggle to see the 'foreign-ness' of a culture from which many of our brothers and sisters around the world are 'alienated' and by whom they are excluded and impoverished.

Psalm 79:1-9



Fridays for Future Climate Strike at the Scottish Parliament, September 2021

(ECS staff)

Other than that it seems to report on actual, rather than expected events Psalm 79 parallels the most strident voices of our own time, leaping ahead to the extreme 'worst-case' possibilities of total social breakdown, should the promises made at COP26 in Glasgow and elsewhere be completely evaded.

Or even so neglected as looks to be the case at time of writing, when the prospect of the agreed 'maximum' average global warming of 1.5 degrees (above pre-industrial levels) now has a 50% likelihood in the next five years.

The natural 'Temple' of many of the world's coral reefs have already been 'profaned' by the bleaching associated with ocean heating. This is shocking, and yet, because it seems to be 'natural', that is, not through the direct agency of armaments and explosives, we struggle to mobilise the outrage which might provoke us to more urgent change. Nonetheless, it is vital to connect positive initiatives, such as 'Net-Zero' with an appropriate faith response to such tragedy.

These scarier parts of Scripture, which are a spiritual response to threat, gradually look more like news reports than picturesque ancient writing. But that they are included in the Bible, and even in the Lectionary compiled in complete innocence of climate issues, gives us resources to build spiritual resilience.

The Psalmist accepts, desperately, that their people have made bad choices. And shockingly prays - not for peace, but for the suffering of their enemies. I heard scientists in the 'Blue Zone of Cop' say that *'up to 1.5, the Earth is our friend. Beyond that, Earth might not be in a position to be our friend.'* Can we make peace now with the Earth?

Would we heed Jesus' teaching about love for enemies in such circumstances? [cf Matt 5:44] And could we start right now, just in case?

Amos 8:4-7

(ECS staff)



Gaelic speaker climate protesters: Scottish Parliament

Amos expresses the anger of God at economic injustice, which is the key driver of environmental harm. We can't shy away from this, especially not given the widespread connections of all our mainstream churches with global partners.

As Rev Rachel Mash, of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa has rather generously put it in a letter to the EcoChaplain, "*it is no longer moral*" for our churches to profit from the misery objectively caused by our cultural addiction to fossil fuels"

any more than - as we are now also learning - it once was for our churches to benefit from the profits and legacy of slavery.

In a well-connected world, these things are definitely not "out of sight, out of mind". We actually have to choose to look away. And if so, we do so in the clear sight of God.

The Fair Trade movement has been one of the most influential in the life of our churches. It requires integrity at all levels, but also a level of compassion, without which trade cannot be to the benefit of all.

Money is not neutral: it always reflects the prejudices of those who use it. Strong and well-enforced environmental regulations will be resisted only by those who look for profit at the cost of the Earth. We frequently lack an 'impact assessment' of the status quo, rather than plans for environmental measures, which therefore seem harsh or expensive.

But our support for those in power, who need the courage and confidence to change conditions, will make a difference. Voting is prayer. Or should be undertaken in combination with prayer.

The 'freedom' of the economically powerful (and their proven huge environmental impact) needs to be recognised as toxic to the "poor". That's what the prophet believes God is aware of.

Psalm 113



(ECS staff)

The will of God is the prosperity and happiness of all. God is no 'respector of privilege'.

Within our common home bounded by Sky (heaven) and Earth, no praise of God is valid which neglects to attend to poverty and to family or community life; no loyalty to 'nation' excuses human leaders who look down, rather than 'raise up'. If God 'in the highest' can 'stoop', what excuse do we have for exclusive privilege?

Can we, with the exhilaration and wonder we feel at a magnificent sunrise or sunset, be encouraged to live, act, pray and praise the Creator who brings such things together with a concern for justice?

Nor is the intention to bring everyone down to the lowest level, but rather to lift up those in need. Campaigns like Net-Zero need to be presented and accepted as act of faith in pursuit of a substantially better life, rather than costs reluctantly expended in obedience to social pressure. In terms of mission, this is an area where the church can lead and be seen to lead.

As an additional note: "the heavens and the earth" (the sky and the soil) encompasses the entirety of what is now under threat though human activity. The presumption of the stability on which even some Biblical poetry rests can no longer be taken for granted.

If , however we investigate the frequency of 'evermore' (verse 2) in poetry like this Psalm, we will find allusions to the relatively temporary or provisional preservation of food with salt, rather than unambiguous and completely open-ended indefinite existence.

It remains interesting, that the use of a mineral from the ground, enables people to think ahead.

Everything that is, even the most robust aspects of Creation, are fragile and finite. Of this we are reminded by the greatness of a God who "stoops down" (verse 5) to care even for the skies above us.

I Timothy 2:1-7



Scottish Parliament rally by many charities and aid agencies, 2019

(Dr Rosemary Power)

A Fierce letter, written in Paul's name by a later disciple, which 'requires prayers for the powerful.'

This is in part to let everyone live peaceful lives, without interference by the rich, or presumably those who do not obey the laws that provide safety for society.

Why do they need our prayers more than others? God wants them to be saved too.

The crunch comes in our core equality before Christ the mediator, before whom all are of equal, endless value. Whatever their task, to govern or to be prophet and apostle, dependant on others as all of us must be who are not prime producers of all our requirements of food and clothing, friendship and acceptance.

The Earth itself, our friend and source of all we need, groans in the act of ever-giving birth to the resources needed by all (Romans 8).

How do we manage the injustice in the taking of some more than is needed? How do we manage the inner hunger that seeks to shore up existence for themselves and their like, while missing the point of the fullness of life is ensuring that others may live?

The injustice they perpetrate traps them. The writer seeks to bring good news to all, showing a way out into equality, for those trapped in privilege as well as those trapped in poverty. We all share the same capacity to sense the sky above us and the Earth beneath our feet.

(Rev David Coleman, ECS staff)

The 'knowledge of the truth' need not be taken narrowly. Awareness of global crisis is a fitting foundation for all prayer; changing minds and hearts to the will of God.

As Environmental Chaplain, I certainly and wholeheartedly endorse the intent of this epistle. When have we been in more need of wisdom in our leaders and rulers than now, when the human

impact on the planet is so massive, and when weapons, as well as industrial processes, can be mobilised on such a global scale?

Prayer for an unjust ruler may be expressed in voting them out of power because support for climate evasion or denial, or for corruption and lies, is contrary to the purpose of prayer: “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity”.

The first audience for this letter had far less power than you do, and needed all the more to reserve even token rebellion for the most acute circumstances. You express power in your vote, your financial choices, and the decisions you make about others.

Certainly within the Scottish Parliament, Members are generally very well-informed about climate issues, though always looking to you, and even the moral support of churches, when deciding how and when to change the conditions which determine how we live and our impact on the environment.

As many local church leaders have done, I was invited to address Parliament for ‘Time for Reflection’ but during COP26. My hope was far more to offer encouragement than criticism. [<https://youtu.be/CRgCtcTDYus>]

You may be surprised at the extent to which the mantle taken up by the writer of the epistle, as ‘herald, apostle, teacher of foreigners and strangers’ falls once more on faith groups - including churches - when we rise to our calling of being beacons of hope in troubled times.

Like the warnings on whisky bottles: ‘enjoy...responsibly!’

And when yourself wield power, however much or little, include yourself in prayer. See if you behave differently.

Luke 16:1-13



Lutheran Protestors at COP26 Glasgow

(Dr Rosemary Power)

‘Unjust steward’

Who owns the earth? Who has control over the basic resources for human life, food, and in a time of crisis like ours, water?

The parable concerns four businesspeople, dealing in large-scale food purchases.

The **products** mentioned, oil and wheat, were the very staples of the poor, the last remaining scraps that the widow of Zaraphath [1 Kings 17:7-16] had, to make a meal for her child, herself and the stranger at her door, Elijah.

Elijah, unlike the **steward**, did not plot out ways to make himself welcomed. He was received without conditions, and what felt like the end of her living was replenished for the widow.

Later, the prophet was able to give back, not as a tiller of soil or man of business, but through free gift in return, the prayer that brought the sick boy back from life's brink.

In being released of full payment of what they owe, the **creditors** have a duty to pass on the excess to those who have nothing, to make sure that their essentials never run out, allowing the widow, her son and her guest to receive what they needed.

There should be no need to beg for those who cannot dig.

International aid is the outpouring of our undeserved riches. In our own nation, our outpouring through taxes and other means should ensure no child is raised in poverty. Those who cannot supply themselves are part of a creation that provides for all. Perhaps our free gift to be distributed is the unearned income from interest on bank accounts, shares, rising house prices.

How does the **rich man** fit in, the one who seemed not to know his wealth, who made a strange demand of his employee, then commended him for looking out for his own comfort? He did not miss the money he failed to receive? Is this manipulation by someone who knows all the facts?

Business once relied on trust and mutual obligation. We focus on the actions of the steward given the strange order to make up the books and does so falsely, but whether the creditors declare all they owe is left to our imaginations. And we are left imagining what happens to all of them. Can we see the **rich man as the Earth** itself, not counting the cost as long as the harvest reaches all, trusting us all, rejoicing in the comfort we receive as well as the labour we provide, knowing all but giving us the chance and choice in how we act?

Given the chance, our earth restores herself, to our delight and benefit. But accruing wealth and power in few hands, of making business the basis of how we organise society, and value people, cannot be sustained. It is not the widows who ravage the land.

As the **commentary** beyond the parable makes clear, trustworthy conduct is at the core of human relations. Wealth distorts trust, and must be held in check. Trusting the earth as the rich man trusts and is trusted may help us restore the balance of resources.

(Rev David Coleman, ECS staff)

'Stewardship Christianity' that comfortable tendency of recent years, is no longer fit for purpose: treating all life like a soul-less commodity, or as property signed over entirely to our species, rather than embracing consultative partnership with the Earth. For some of you, this will be the first time

'stewardship' was challenged, but at this year's ECEN (European Churches Environmental Network) there was wide consensus that "stewardship" was no longer a viable image for our place in the care of God's Creation.

Is this, however, the sort of "stewardship" we really *are* actually called to: lovable rogues, rather than grim rule-keepers who collaborate with oppression and environmental disaster?

This story is a gift for our day: both with Jesus' characteristic admonition to 'Children of Light' to reclaim craftiness as a Gospel virtue, and the description of the wealth that the steward/manager has charge of as 'unjust wealth', set in perspective as a negotiable means to the end of fellowship and hospitality. Wealth is not neutral.

It is well established that fossil fuel companies continue to bankroll the denial of climate change and its devastating effects. Faithfulness to "wealth-of-dubious-justice" gives rise to wilful deception, taking advantage of ignorance and gullibility.

Do not assume that the wealthy – and actually unjust – master in this parable is God. The closest we have got to meeting God face to face is in a poor, and possibly redundant carpenter. This master is a predator. He's not bothered whether the reports are true: the mere accusation is enough for him to yell, 'You're fired!' (Although clearly there's a custom of 'working your notice' taken for granted in the story, through which the "steward" triumphs.)

What does Jesus mean when he talks about 'faithfulness with dishonest wealth?' If the right master to serve, exclusively, is God, then the crafty generosity, which liberates from hardship, is faithfulness to the God who values God's people, creatures and planet.

But remember how clearly this is put, and by Jesus: you really really **cannot** serve both God and wealth

Sermon Ideas: (Luke 16:1-13) **(ECS staff)**



Do you think of Christian character as 'crafty'? if not, why not?

The story of the *'steward of unjust wealth'* is one we cannot let slip by.

It is of huge value to our reflection on our relationship with Creation since we are part of a species which, through their unjust choices and actions to their own members, also disrupts and destroys those fellow creatures on whom we rely.

So much of our lifestyle implicates us in the grave injustices which neighbours far - and not so far- are already suffering.

The first treasure here is the recognition of "ultimatum": whether or not the accusations against the steward are just, it is plain that their way of life cannot continue. Our 'global north' ways have been amply proven to be unsustainable even in the medium term, and the shocking impact of Storm Arwen last year, wiping out 16 million trees in one night should have woken us up to the warnings that such things become far more frequent with each small increment of global warming.

It is the ability to 'read the signs' and act which propels the 'steward' into a *"state of emergency"*, when decisions have to be made faster and with what might otherwise seem more recklessly, to save their life.

What can we do to improve the responsiveness of the life and work of our churches to this threat, accelerating day by day?

A number of our churches - including the award-winning EcoCongregation of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral Edinburgh, have formally and in worship, declared a state of emergency: recognising that things really have changed, and that every assumption of stability and continuation of what we have relied on, needs to change.

A sermon could compare the intransigence of 'children of the light' who attempt to keep themselves aloof from the harshness of the brutality of the wider economy, and the gifts of the wheeler-dealers who know when to cut their losses.

Both exercise gifts from God, How can they find common ground, in the face of common threat?

Additionally, the 'steward' takes care that those with whom they deal are pleased with the outcome. Goodwill is stored up.

"Making friends with the Earth", on whom we have for generations waged war, is an urgent aim which ought to come to mind as we read the authoritative reports of climate scientists.

Nature has huge value in moderating and mitigating the crisis we're already experiencing, even in Scotland. There will be give and take, but the 'steward' is canny enough not to be so overcome by greed that they 'burn their boats.

Finally, as noted in a number of international church conferences, mere 'stewardship' which deals with the Earth as if fellow creatures had no say in the matter, needs to be left behind in favour of 'partnership' 'shepherding' or even 'management' - something which dynamically sensitively - and even craftily - acknowledges the interests of the Earth as well as our own.

A Declaration of Climate Emergency

We, St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral,
declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency

We pledge to work with and support our congregation, and government at local and national levels, in tackling this Emergency, and we invite churches across our Diocese to do the same.

These are our intentions:

1. We will tell the Truth

We will communicate with members of our congregation and support them to discover the truth about the Emergency, lobby for consistent policy-making, and communicate the need for urgent far-reaching

changes.

2. We will take Action

As part of the Scottish Episcopal Church, we commit to work towards reducing our emissions to net zero by 2030. We will challenge policies and actions of local and national governments and their agencies, where they do not help to reduce emissions or consumption levels. We will actively work to imagine and model ways in which our faith and our congregations can enable the planet's resources to be safeguarded and regenerated.

3. We will seek for Justice

We will do what is possible to enable dialogue and expression among our congregation and the communities we serve about how the Emergency will affect them and the changes that are needed. We believe that all truth-telling, action and democratic work must be underpinned by a commitment to justice both within our nation and towards other nations, particularly those who are poorer. We will bring the power of faith to the task of re-imagining the ways in which we relate to one another and to God's world.

PRAYERS AND OPENING/CLOSINGS



The silent Christian vigil protest outside COP 26 Campus in November 2021

Call to worship: (ECS staff)

The Earth belongs to God:

A home for every creature!

How beautiful, how full of life:

the cycles, seasons of God's Word!

Let all who have breath praise their God

Let all who listen, learn!

Prayer of Confession: (Dr Rosemary Power)

God of all resources, make us slow to criticise our neighbour.

May we see not the scrounger

but the one who is not strong enough to dig out their own livelihood,

and let us not shame them by treating benefit receipt as begging.

May we take as we need, give as we can, and restore and we should.

In each act may we work with the world we are part of, with the values of Christ in our heart.

AMEN

Prayers of Gratitude and Intercession. (Rev Julia Meason, Church of Scotland, Orkney)

Lord, we praise you for your goodness to us in making us part of your splendid creation: planet, waters, skies, flora, and fauna. As part of our praise, we bring before you our concerns for ourselves and for your beloved world.

Today we pray for Eco-congregations, and those who are hearing the call for Christians to be seen to care for Creation. May they be beacons of change and hope in the midst of a wasteful society. May they challenge, inspire, and cajole those around them.

"The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant." (Is. 24:4-5)

May the governments take seriously the threat of climate change and put their promises and goals into action. May they introduce policies which make for thriving of all God's creatures.

Grant that fair trade becomes the norm – enabling communities to look after their environment, their communities, and their families.

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The One “enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth”, may we do as you do: may we notice the devastation of your earth, the cries of your living creatures, groaning under the oppression of the sea of plastic suffocating them, the poverty of those forgotten and despised by the world. May we stoop down with you to lift up, encourage and empower.

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We pray for ourselves who have so much power to speak up, buy less, buy more ethically, reuse, repair and recycle. May we be willing to be used by you, sacrificing our comfort for the good of all. May we use our wealth, authority, and status wisely and generously. In your powerful name we pray. Amen.

Closing (ECS Staff)

We have heard

Our choices matter!

Christ is with us

come what may!

We will change minds

Even our minds!

Good loves all

The World, today!

AMEN

MUSIC CHOICES

an environmental spirituality:

*because you value song
you also value
birdsong*



We commend the excellent ongoing resource via Trinity College, in which our board member, Iain McLarty, is full involved:

Trinity College: Songs for Sunday

<https://www.trinitycollegelglasgow.co.uk/post/creation-time>

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And finally: A new song to metrical tunes: (ECS Staff)

Sustain your soul with hope and thanks

Meter CM - especially 'University' - but choose a fresh, light tune.

For use with Luke 15:1-10 (or other passages)

A hymn poem on the value of 'Low hanging fruit', and of celebration to sustain us.

1) Sustain your soul with hope and thanks
the things that do you good
that justice may flow from your joy
-as blood from nails and wood.

2) Do not hold back with praise that heals
despair's cost is too high
Your smiles and laughter in despite
shall crushing power defy.

3) The Wildest Wind of God blew in
at Pentecost with flame
releasing inhibitions' chains
to play God's fairest game.

4) Your own wee greening stumbles for
the prayer-embodied Earth
shall justify through Sea and Sky;
empower angelic mirth!