

This week....

Jeremiah [32] uses traditional and ancestral land rights to undermine the idea that we completely possess the Earth, rather than enjoying God's gift of the right to live from the land. Indigenous peoples of today would understand this. Do we?

Psalm 91 poses questions of our assurance in the solidarity of God when disasters really do happen. Is it naive and deceptive, or a help in building our spiritual resilience to live on with hope through the reality of today? **Rev Ruth Harvey, Leader of the Iona Community** enlists the tenacious help of the small pink flower of thrift in her reflection in the Psalm, **also on downloadable video**

Members of the EcoCongregation at **Dunscore** explore with Amos 6, **in video and words**, the ultimatum God pronounces on the toxic luxury of the 'loungers' whose unjust excesses are at the cost of fellow creatures.

And globally respected speaker **Rev Canon Dr Rachel Mash, Environmental Coordinator at Anglican Church of Southern Africa** offers a reflection on the spiritual poverty of the rich man who somehow manages to be oblivious to the plight of Lazarus on his very doorstep. In a world of highly sophisticated communications, everywhere is 'on our doorstep'.

In the prayers section, we offer **(also on video, recorded at Isle of Colonsay Parish Church)** a prayer placing the net zero ambitions of our churches firmly in the context of a response of faith,

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

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15



(ECS staff)

Despite his ‘Prophet of Doom’ credentials, Jeremiah here expresses a sacrificially rebellious hope by investing in a far-from certain future, though the cultural milieu is so different from our own, that we need to read with great care the language and vocabulary into which our translators dutifully chose to render the Hebrew. In particular be wary of equivalence in notions of property, and the extent to which, in our time and place, land may simply be disposed of as if the land had no say in the matter.

Are we nonetheless prepared to learn from Jeremiah’s example to model a better and more sustainable life in the choices we make with the resources in our hands? Even the replacement home or church boiler? If you’ve got gas or oil, though superficially, it looks cheaper, how much sense does it make, morally, or financially even in the medium term, to tie yourself into further dependence on fossil fuels. (If, that is, you live in a location where there is genuine choice.)

Jeremiah’s act is quite comparable with those who wisely or sacrificially bypass the gradualism which even in a time of crisis still masquerades as wisdom - for instance, replacing ‘like for like’, whilst wondering why ‘net-zero’ looks so hard.

How interesting is it too, that Jeremiah feels called to buy the “right to use” the land following meticulously the existing laws and processes of his people? Does this assert the need for justice in our dealings with the land, as well as with people? Admittedly, Jeremiah can also be really obscure, but just under the surface, there are also some gems we can pick up and run with.

The Jewish ‘rights of redemption’ presuppose that the ‘land’ can never truly be ‘private property’ as we would think of it; and therefore the ancestral rights to land which is ‘sold’ should have been returned to those exercising what might today be thought of as ‘indigenous’ rights, that is, a God-given partnership relationship, of specific benefit to people, livestock, “land-self” and the wildlife to whom land is also given as a habitat. (cf Leviticus 25) The sabbath - a fallow seventh year after six of sowing and reaping, as well as the ‘jubilee’ - the fiftieth year and therefore the ‘sabbath of sabbaths’ is not only in recognition that the Earth belongs to God, but also that the land, in person, needs space and time to recover from what is being demanded by human exploitation - even the basic exploitation involved in growing food and providing shelter for human beings. Science happily supports what ancient religious regulations stipulate.

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16



Rev Ruth Harvey, Leader of the Iona Community

The Thrift is a tender, strong spark of pink that clings to the edge of the Earth.

This sea-sprayed flower is usually found on the margins, at beaches or on cliffs.

Thrift thrives between the shadow of cliff and the spectre of ocean – inhabiting that liminal shoreline space between dry land and vast water. Cliff and ocean compared to the tiny thrift could overwhelm. In fact for this flower they offer a wing, a shelter, a refuge.

In his poem called 'Thrift' Robert Macfarlane evokes the clinging-on, the digging-in tenacity of thrift holding her delight up to us as an inspiration from the Earth to all who are on the margins, who live in fear of being overshadowed or engulfed.

Here are Macfarlane's words:

'Thrift knows hardship is a limit not a failing;
Thrift persists despite all odds,
and Thrift's gift is – Thrift's grace is –
to give a glimpse of hope in the tightest of spots,
the toughest of places.'

For Thrift to thrive the balance found in the symbiotic relationship between ocean and cliff, between shelter and vulnerability must be tenderly nurtured.

The Earth, Thrift, models for us this tenacity, this tender digging in.

In the face of overwhelming odds – how do we work with rather than against Earth to notice refuge where we may see terror?

What is ours to do, to ensure that Earth herself is offered refuge, a wing of safety in this world blindly bent on her destruction?

On video at: <https://vimeo.com/721455829>

(ECS staff)



Don't fall for the initial impression of a naive "everything's going to be all right" poem, though some of the comfort it offers does seem to be wishful thinking. God is "with us in trouble" (verse 15). And the trouble is there with or without our relationship with God.

None of the dangers and threats are abolished by the prayer of the Psalmist, but all of them are better faced, and maybe some escaped, though the spiritual resilience of faith in God. We do not fix the world by changing a light-bulb, but the prayer which such small actions represent, better prepares us to face what lies ahead.

There are some rather lovely images of God here, in particular that of a mother bird- perhaps an eagle?- sheltering her vulnerable young under her wings.

There's also reassurance for protection against shame and humiliation, which are such devastating prospects throughout the Psalms. Faith builds the confidence we need, even in the face of threat, to stand up to what assails us.

Amos 6:1a,4-7



The talking boilers. from the Dunscore video.

See video from worshippers at Dunscore Parish: the talking boilers who know their time is up!

<https://vimeo.com/709993580>

(ECS staff)

The Dunscore Congregation put things bluntly and with humour: please do view the video, whether or not you use it in worship. <https://vimeo.com/709993580>

Self-deception and detachment from the costly realities which underly extravagant affluence are the thin veil which makes possible the ultimately unsustainable 'revelry of the loungers'. Their excessive comfort is at the cost of their fellow creatures- human and otherwise.

Think of the 'lounges' in airports: what a temple of consumerism and pollution, all presented as glamour and status! But the prophet introduces the unsettling vision that things will catch up with those who so disregard their responsibility and dependance on those which whom they share the land.

The mention of 'David' as the harpist of psalms (perhaps alluding to his entertainment of Saul?) reminds us that our faith can also appear be practised in alienation from the needs and realities of Earth and those who live more directly in relationship with Earth.

On a tour of Mount Stuart, just one of the several intoxicatingly grand mansions of the Marquess of Bute, paid for, effectively, by the blood of the workers in his coalmines, I was told, in the fantasy chapel, that he was "very religious". The God Amos speaks for would disagree. Nor is it just the super-rich who might have pause for thought. According to Ruth Valerio of Tearfund, six days of consumption for a person in the UK has the same impact on the environment as a year for someone in Malawi.

Considering the huge changes in climate, and the rise in sea-levels, authoritatively expected even by 2030, whom does a consumer lifestyle - oblivious to poverty and climate - most endanger?
Can we find happiness in a different direction? Reward in living responsibly, and with special allowance for those - perhaps in our island communities - who have no choice, for now, but to depend on lifeline fossil fuel vehicles?

Transition is a must, but transition must be just, not 'leaving anyone behind'.

Psalm 146



(ECS staff)

If you want to find God - and rejoice in that finding - look down, rather than up! And there's real, sustaining joy built in to praising a God who's so conspicuously worthy of that praise, through solidarity, above all, with creatures in most need. Whose credentials as guardian of justice marry together with those of the creator of 'heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them.'

Even though that outstanding need, prohibiting complacency, continues to challenge our faithfulness.

The first reaction of many Christians to the crushing realisation of the state of the planet is often 'lament' - a response in the stable of grief and bereavement.

And yet, given the firm prospect of the impact of rising sea levels and more throughout our lifetimes, let alone a 50% likelihood of reaching that crucial maximum upper limit of global warming of 1.5 degrees in the next five years, with all that means for coral reefs, for vital insects and more, is this the only story?

We need our faith to sustain us long-term, and a life lived only in lament seems a grim prospect. Movements for racial and other liberation have a different resource: the joyful and defiant claim to hope beyond hope: the spirituality of 'Hallelujah anyway', not requiring the permission of a rational pathway to that hope, which faith, nonetheless supplies.

The cyclic aspect of nature is taken as read: cycles of water, carbon, and nutrients participate in God's triumph over vain aspirations to permanence and absolute power by human rulers who, like every other creature 'return to dust'. A befriending of mortality is the beginning of a closer walk with God. If you refuse to acknowledge threat, you'll blunder into it.

As to the aspirations of humanity to dominate and control, the ancient wisdom of the Psalmist is content to dismiss such things.

Finally, if you really want something to challenge a congregation: - given that even the most conscientious translators translate into the English they think they ought to, there's an unexpected wariness to embrace. This insight is a fruit of our currently

renewed awareness of the **fragility** of Creation as a whole. Even the aspects of Creation to whose resilience Scripture likes to appeal, are objectively endangered. Always be wary of claims to open-ended “endlessness” or “forever”. (cf Verse 5b). An awareness of endings, even the endings of ages, saves us from the complacency of sitting back and neglecting the activism and engagement to which God calls all faithful people, according to their opportunity and ability. ‘Open-ended endlessness, especially the ‘endless growth’ of the throwaway single-use economy, surreptitiously works its way into our reading of Scripture. “Throughout all generations” is one thing, but “forever”, come what may, is something else. There is more work to be done, and we need both prayerful and scholarly input, but only God is forever.

I Timothy 6:6-19



(Rev David Coleman ECS staff)

The letter to Timothy is extraordinarily challenging, both to its recipient and to his community. Do we underestimate the courage shown here in rattling the cages of the rich and privileged even within our churches, and in calling out the sometimes undue influence of those charged with managing the financial assets of our churches? Yet they act with conscientious devotion too. managing gifts for the good of the church.

In my first pastorate, the treasurer insisted on publishing in the annual report, the individual contributions of church members, which sadly reinforced the inequality of influence within a

particular congregation. “We have to do it, or people won’t give” was the explanation. When a full meeting of the church opted for confidentiality, giving actually rose.

Green Christian’s ‘Joy in enough’ project [<https://joyinenough.org>] offers resources to investigate the wonderful freedom from the compulsion to pile up possessions and riches. As a local pastor, I sometimes prayed to be delivered from the woes of the rich!

And yet there is such power immersively exercised by public opinion and every aspect of the media to keep us under the thumb of the idolatry of ‘only more is better’ distorting even our perception of God. ‘Eternal’ life ends up as defined only as ‘endless’ rather than, primarily, a participation, within this present age, in God’s care for the World.

And if or when we do find ourselves well off: what a lovely opportunity to do good. Globally, however, wealth demonstrably goes together with an extreme environmental impact. It’s not always possible to pile up and hold on to “unjust wealth” in order to use it for good.

Or do you have credible examples to the contrary?

Luke 16:19-31

Bonus: for a video reading by a church childrens’ group: see <https://vimeo.com/721419534> (Producer: ECS staff)

A street recycler and a BMW- in Harare, Zimbabwe



By Rev Canon Dr Rachel Mash, Environmental Coordinator at Anglican Church of Southern Africa

“The man with no name”

A millionaire film star slaps another and we know his name, a billionaire buys up Twitter - we know his name. The names of those threatened by starvation as crops fail in Northern Kenya, those who lost their homes in Madagascar two years in succession from hurricanes super charged by warming oceans – their names we do not know.

The story of Lazarus and the rich man turns our reality upside down. Lazarus has a name. In all of Jesus' parables he is the only person that Jesus names.

Lazarus lives at the gate of the unnamed rich man, hungry, ragged and sick. The rich man cannot say that he did not know. He knows the words of the prophets about poverty and injustice, he knows that he is a descendant of Abraham. And yet day in and day out he walks past his suffering neighbour.

We cannot say that we do not know about climate change, we have constant feeds on our social media and yet we do nothing. The science is clear, we have to make sacrificial changes to our lifestyles, to our countries' policies. Our neighbour has a name –

My neighbour is called Nonhlanhla she lives in Durban, she went to study at University and couldn't afford the residence fees so stayed in a shack with a family member. They couldn't find land so built on the banks of the river. Just before Easter a years worth of rain fell in two days. Durban was hit by a rain bomb. Her home was washed away, she drowned in a wall of mud.

Who is your global neighbour, what is their name?

Sermon Ideas:

I Timothy 6:6-19 and Luke 16:19-31

The 'circular economy' of Creation: a net-zero life.



“We brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it”

Even 'straight from the book' funerals are the most poetically daring expressions of Christian worship. Funerals speak to the spiritual needs of people facing extreme stress and crisis. At such acute times, we employ, without embarrassment, modes of storytelling which might otherwise seem childlike or trite. And yet, in that extremity, the stories carry us, comfort us, heal us. Poetry and spiritual speech then emerges, not just as pointlessly ornamental, but as the most sophisticated resource to help us confront urgent and seemingly irreconcilable pressures - such as an awareness of the multiple crises we shorthand as 'climate'.

That's why the 'bad news' of crises belong in our worship: in the sacred space of the Good News'.

The grief and anxiety which this awareness causes is widespread and far-reaching. My daughter, well aware of the global situation, suffered a panic attack when the United Nations 'Code Red' report was published in 2021

Couples consider whether to bring children into a world facing catastrophe; young climate protestors wonder if they have a future.

Yet 'Do not worry about tomorrow' says Jesus. [Matthew 6:34] - we have enough, urgently to deal with today.

To take seriously scenarios for the environmental change is to risk bereavement of previous expectations. Or the numbness of keeping your head down and hoping for the best.

Christianity, founded on faith, hope and love, should have more to offer

The community that transmitted I Timothy (*the meaning of the name is "one who honours God"*) express profound ecological wisdom: the vision of a zero-impact on the "bottle-garden" of Creation as Bible writers, with wisdom and foresight, envisaged it. Science only confirms the interconnectedness and interdependence of life, in the cycles of nature, and the matter we borrow for our physical existence, our food, shelter and clothes. Likewise: that excessive consumption causes real -and global- harm.

Is it therefore at all considerate or loving, to refrain from speaking out -as the letter commends to the 'godly person' Timothy -out of politeness or an unhelpful humility about contradicting the opinions of others?

And if or when we do find ourselves well off: what a lovely opportunity to do good. Globally, however, wealth demonstrably goes together with an extreme environmental impact. It's not always possible to hold on to "unjust wealth" in order to use it for good.

In the story of the rich Man and Lazarus, whose only companionship comes from the despised dogs who lick his wounds, the rich man, in the 'Hades' of folk tale, concludes that the one he had so comprehensively despised as completely to ignore their plight, should give due warning to his friends and family about the toxicity of their own lifestyles. But for him it's too late.

Whose voice and insights have we shut out, at our own peril?

Women? Children, who comprise the majority of the 'climate strike' movement? Our sisters and brothers in Christ in the Pacific, threatened now for decades by the rising seas? the Earth-self?

In the folktale, Abraham asserts that the 'Law and the Prophets' should have been sufficient, without (is this an addition of the Early Church?) "someone rising from the dead". That we have, in Christ himself.

How much more, is it going to take for the poor, and the Earth, to be heard and helped?

Are we 'Timothy'? is it time to honour God by changing course, and lovingly, speaking out?

PRAYERS AND OPENING/CLOSINGS



From Kath Aitken, Dunscore Parish
(also on video: <https://vimeo.com/709993580>)

Lord God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit
we heartily thank you for your extravagant gifts of Creation.
forgive us, Lord, for the harm that we cause to the Land, Sea, and Sky.
-and therefore to our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Please give us the will, faith and creativity
to play our part in making your world a better place
for all to live in safety,
with our fair share of the Earth's resources,
freely given by you
for the benefit of all, equally.
AMEN

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Call to worship (ECS Staff)

Creator God, of Justice

You are with us now

Bright God of Change

You will walk beside us

Dark God of Comfort

You will see us through

Rainbow God of life

We will follow you!

Prayer of approach, confession, pardon.(ECS Staff)

When we are wandering
lacking direction
down on our luck
far from the coast

When we've been pushed
to uncertain surroundings
tossed by the whim
of the way things turn out

Then, in the emptiness, life looks us eye to eye

Then, though we still might attend to the lies that lead out
Then, though confronted by impossible outcomes
God will be with us
God will be with us
God will be with us
Whatever they say.

God in love with flesh and blood
yet testing and trying
we bring you our efforts and failures;
the things which just went wrong
and harm we went ahead and chose.

We bring to you in openness, the damage to fellow creatures
for which we share responsibility
And those times when we forgot
how you value and can use each seed,
each prayer,
each decision made in love.
We bring you bitterness, which is always a choice
and ask for your help with letting go of it
and of everything we should cling to no longer
We come to you for healing, forgiveness and hope,
And in silence wait on what cannot be taken for granted
But what is granted nonetheless
to set us free
for joy and service
in this world you love.

As forgiven people, then, and as those on the way, we pray in the way you taught us...

LORD'S PRAYER/OUR FATHER

Gratitude/Thanksgiving (ECS Staff)

Thanks be to you our God,
for the opportunity to live lovingly this day,
through your cycles of life and of goodness;

Our hearts are uplifted in gratitude
to know that when we open our lips to praise you,
we do so with every creature who breathes in
what the trees and green things breathe out.

We thank you for a faith which makes all the more sense
in our growing awareness of crisis and need,
and of our complete interdependence
in the web of life in which we weave our thread.

From the worms to the whales;

from the microbes that break down dead things
to feed the flowers;
to the billions of cells
which make each one of us who we are:
thank-you God for life, and hope,
and the prayers of your church
through which we are not abandoned to despair,
but gathered in, by grace
through Christ, the Word
made flesh
and blood
and love
AMEN

Net Zero Prayer



graphic: Scottish Govt

see also on video : <https://vimeo.com/713823219>

A Prayer of Ambition-to place the Net-Zero campaigns of churches, and of civil society in the context of a response of faith-

[Romans 12:10

love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.]

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Sustaining God, Incarnate in the Earth; Wild Wind of life
may we praise you with all that we are
in the obedient reshaping of all that we have and do
for your glory, as Good News for all Creation.

Expose the pride in humility's clothing
of sitting back as if we could do nothing
And the folly disguised as wisdom
of delay, and 'bit by bit'

So may our work and worship join hands
and shamelessly uncover the impact of what we still need to do
whilst striving to balance and heal
the harm so unjustly distributed.

May we indeed, and with mutual encouragement
outdo one another in showing honour to the Earth
Looking not only for savings in carbon emissions 'on paper'
but beauty, integrity and a betterment of life for people and planet
for wildlife and all the creatures to whom God also gives the Earth as habitat, as home.

Net-zero is the end of excuses and exceptions,
it brings repentance and acceptance of responsibility
for damage to Earth's life, both past and urgently present

Dear God, who loves the Earth
reminding us in the rainbow of your Covenant;
may sun and rain each day proclaim
the scope of this ambition,
the daunting height of hills we need to climb
but more, the grace on which our life is founded,
looking forward with joy and hope
to the day when we surmount that summit
and glimpse with awe, delighted, the way ahead

AMEN

(translated , means 'Get on with it!')

Closing (ECS Staff)

Final responses and Blessing **(from 'Wildlife Week', Iona Abbey, based on Job 12:8)**

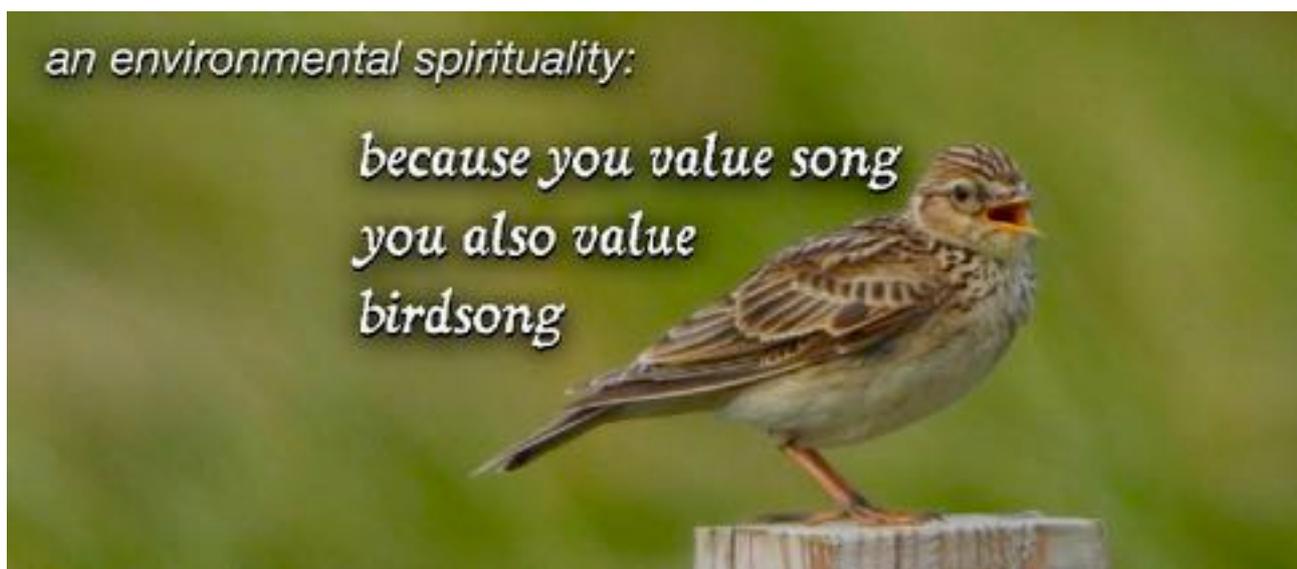
May we speak to the Earth
to be taught of your goodness
and the fish in the sea
to be schooled of your wisdom.
As the birds make sky heaven

so may we live for justice,
as Good News
for every good creature you love,
who needs us as we need them.

Blessing:

Now may the God of Justice
The Sustainer
The Beloved made flesh
The Reshaper
bless you with courage, faith and cheerfulness
to Get on with it. **AMEN!**

MUSIC CHOICES



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.trinitycollegelsgow.co.uk/post/creation-time>

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

God and Politics

For use with I Timothy 2:1-7 or other passages

Meter 8886 e.g. Saffron Walden, Childhood

it is, of course, absurd, to say, or tolerate the saying, that ‘religion and politics don’t mix’, since both are concerned with the good of people and planet. The Timothy passage can, however, be read in a way which encouraged quietist disengagement.

This hymn poem disagrees

1) If rulers are from God, it's plain
they'll always seek the common good.
So Christians pray, and give support,
where justice is assured.

2) When rulers lie and cheat and steal;
with malice, trample on the weak
then still we pray, protest and vote;
speak out, when called to speak.

3) God, even-handed sends the rain
bright Sun, through leaves; Creation's fuel.
Our choices have their part to play:
the web of life's renewal....

4) When rulers act to tend the Earth:
-every transition must be just-
with all good will, our prayers and more
give power and hope and trust.