



**This year our opening week coincides with CTBI's Climate Sunday  
Various different churches will have all sorts of materials available.  
We hope that what we are able to present will promote prayer, thought,  
and action.**

## **6TH SEPTEMBER: WEEK 1:**

### **Prayers:**



**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**

The Creator of the Universe calls us to leave the darkness behind and live in the light.  
Our Lord Jesus Christ who lived and died and rose again greets us this day.  
The One who danced at Creation's birth calls us now into His presence.  
So come let us worship.

### **Prayers of Approach, Confession and Pardon**

O God,  
you adorn the poor

binding rulers in chains  
and allowing the people to rejoice;  
rise up O God anew,  
adorn your creation,  
bind all that seeks to destroy it,  
that we may not perish but live.

O God,  
often it seems we have to eat bitter herbs  
as the Angel of Death has not passed over us;  
we grieve those who have died from Covid 19,  
lives lost from all over our land,  
old and young, fit and frail,  
care-worker and bus driver, nurse and doctor.

As we grieve we have to accept:  
our complicity,  
our failure to plan,  
our failure to learn the lessons,  
our failure to care for our world,  
and our failure to treat nature and animal life with respect.

Forgive us, good Lord,  
and help us to turn our sorrow into action,  
our failure into change,  
our guilt into grace.

*pause*

God, the source of all mercy,  
has sent the Holy Spirit amongst us  
for the forgiveness of sins,  
the equipping of the saints  
and the fine tuning of our hearts.  
Know that you are forgiven,  
know too that you, with all of humanity,  
need to use the grace of forgiveness  
to be an energy of change. Amen.

#### Prayer of Illumination

Sometimes, O God,  
Your Word is hard for us.

Sometimes, O God,  
we don't want to hear You.  
Sometimes, O God,  
we'd rather sing our nice hymns,  
pray our comforting prayers,  
and turn away from what You require.  
Send Your Holy Spirit,  
that we may turn to You,  
in Word read and proclaimed,  
that we may listen, understand, change and obey.  
Amen.

### Blessing

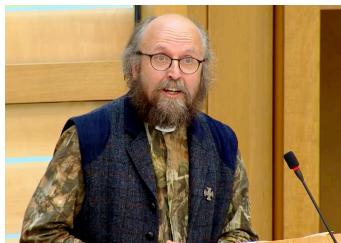
May the One who adorns the poor,  
binds the rulers,  
and causes the people to rejoice,  
adorn you with love,  
bind all that seeks evil,  
and give you cause to rejoice  
and the blessing of Almighty God  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with you,  
and all whom you love,  
now and ever more  
Amen.

or

....and the blessing of Almighty God,  
the Three-in-One  
be with you,  
and all whom you love,  
now and ever more  
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 12:1-14:



**Patsy Thomson:**

**Warden of Lay Readers for Moray, Ross & Caithness Diocese of the Scottish Episcopal Church**

**Initial comment:**

***The food shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat it .***

Fair shares. The meal is eaten in community. Nothing is wasted.

We can recognise that this may be difficult passage for pacifists and vegetarians. other folks will have significant challenges elsewhere! Here, in the devotional life of God's people we encounter whole-scale slaughter and blood. Firstborn animals struck down as well as humans .

As we encountered earlier in the year, when people are under pressure, Times and Seasons still give shape to our lives . Here. Passover is declared to be Day One of Year One .

Freedom beckons . We can resolve to start afresh - begin to treat creation differently. Sharing resources, acting inclusively and responsibly - not forgetting our ongoing need for memorials and community rituals to mark our salvation and liberation and our ongoing need to recommit to caring for creation, Sunday by Sunday, season by season.

## **Scripture Passage overview**

The commandments begin with instructions about time, identifying that the current month will henceforth signify the beginning of the year for the Israelites. When the Israelites are no longer locked down as slaves, they will be able to take control of their time in ways they could not have done previously. The new year also signifies the start of a new way of life, when God will have redeemed the people from Egypt. These are communal commandments addressed "**to all the congregation of Israel**" ( Exodus 12:3) When they share the feast if the Passover together, people strengthen ties. Verse 11 explains how the Israelites are to eat their meat, with sandals on, loins girded, and a staff in hand: ready to move. This first Passover was not an end in itself but the beginning of a new way of living and being.

In the Abrahamic faiths, chronological reckoning begins from what is considered the decisive point in history after which nothing remains the same. In Christendom, with the birth of Christ; in the Islamic world the Hijra, Muhammed's flight from Mecca; in Judaism it begins here, at the deliverance out of Egypt. Chronological reckoning began at that point where God was perceived to begin creating a community of redemption. In addition to experiencing God's redemption, Israel becomes the people of God by memorialising it in a ritual for the sake of later generations who were not there to experience for themselves the transformation from slavery to freedom, from death to life.

This text is also appointed for Maundy Thursday each year. The Gospel record conspicuously associates the death of Jesus with this Passover memorial, and churches often refer to this in Communion/Eucharistic services. In the New Covenant way of memorialising, the death of Jesus is woven into the memory of divine action bringing deliverance. As in Egypt, we exist in this world as the people of God not solely by virtue of the death of Jesus, but also in our re-membering of it; of bringing together what should not be apart.

The Israelites' escape from Egypt is a well-known story - breaking free from Pharaoh's control it suggests the freedom to become a new people .In Exodus 12:1-14 the rite of passage begins with the Israelites' status as slaves to Pharaoh (their old identity), advances to a period of preparation for the next stage ("liminality" - or being in transition ), and concludes with crossing over into a new status as the people of God (their new identity). They are still in the land of Egypt on the verge of departure, so freedom is only a future hope.

The occasion is fraught with danger and uncertainty and possibility. The emphasis is both on God's salvation from bondage / shielding from death, and also the response of the community: they are to prepare for a journey (12:11). The saved community must be ready to go, must be prepared for a trek that will move through difficult terrain (12:11).

# PSALM 149

John Collings :

**lay preacher in the United Reformed Church,**

**Trustee of EcoCongregation Scotland, and Secretary of URC Church & Society Committee in Scotland**



This Psalm is almost in two halves. The first is easy to read as it is full of rejoicing and joy and resonates with our modern idea of a kind and just God. The second section is far more difficult to read in modern times as it talks of vengeance and punishment, concepts that are alien to people today. Or if not alien, we avoid talk of them. Some people believe it was written to celebrate some great victory, possibly when David had taken the stronghold of Zion (2 Samuel 5:7.) We may find the idea of v6 strange: how can we praise God while holding a weapon of war?

Looking at the great changes in the psalm can remind us of how our relationship with creation has changed. We can look back through history when we lived in harmony with nature. The victory that this psalm was written about was during the bronze age and at that time there was no wholesale destruction of the earth. People lived far more in harmony with nature and mining for copper and tin were on a small scale.

The second part is far more like the situation since the industrial revolution. We could be described as being at war with the creation with pollution, emissions, massive mines for a variety of minerals, plants fed artificial fertilisers. Wars usually end - eventually, though it takes a lot of work to end a war. People need to accept that things have to change; to agree terms and eventually to live at peace together. We can do this with creation if we are willing to listen to the groaning of the world. We need to stop the war by reducing

emissions, considering the environment is every decision that we make and get back to the start of the psalm and “Sing to the LORD a new song” of freedom from the fear of rising oceans and climate chaos.

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## Ezekiel 33.7–11



Hannah Brown.

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

This passage comes from the prophet Ezekiel, called by God to be a prophet to the people of Israel. The early part of Ezekiel 33 offers an image of the prophet as a ‘sentinel’ (33: 7). A sentinel was a guard, employed to stand and keep watch over the city. Their role was to warn the people if danger was imminent. The sentinel was not responsible for whether the people took heed of the warning and responded well. Their task was simply to blow the trumpet and warn the people – the people’s response was in their own hands. It is in this context that we see Ezekiel’s message of warning to the people of Israel.

The passage can be split into two parts. Firstly, verses 7-9 hears God telling Ezekiel his role. If he shares the message God sends him and the people do not respond, it is their fault. If he does not share the message and the people are placed in danger, then Ezekiel is to blame.

Secondly, verses 10-11 set out the message that God wants Ezekiel to pass on. He articulates the collective guilt of the people of Israel – they have realised their sins, and believe that their struggles are connected to their transgression (v10). In response, Ezekiel emphasises God’s desire for renewal and redemption. God cares much less for the punishment of the wicked than for the renewal of those who see their sin and turn towards a different journey. It is this call, therefore, to turn back to God that Ezekiel shares with the people of Israel.

Splitting the passage into these two sections helps us to consider the different messages that can be drawn. In the first few verses, the reader can more easily position themselves in the shoes of Ezekiel. What is our role in sharing the warnings we hear from creation's cries, as we witness the effects of the climate crisis and other injustice? What role does the church have to play in standing watch over creation, and calling the people of God to response when danger threatens our communities?

The second part of the passage enables us to position ourselves as the people of Israel, as we both hear and respond to the cries of warning. Who are the sentinels – the prophets – standing watch and sharing warning that danger is coming our way today? Do we listen to their cry? Furthermore, how do we respond? The cry of the people in verse 10 suggests that the danger is not only coming from outside of the city walls but within. Where is our collective guilt, in accepting responsibility for the dangers before us? And when we realise this, what should our response be? Positioning ourselves here as we read the passage also gives us the chance to hear and receive God's merciful response, and the call to renewal as a way forward.

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## **PSALM Psalm 119.33–40**



**Richard Murray:**

**Lay reader in the Scottish Episcopal Church**

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Psalm 119 is an alphabetic acrostic, (a poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, message or alphabet) in which its 176 verses are divided into stanzas of eight verses, each of which begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This mathematical cleverness was a common wisdom teaching aid, partly to catch our attention and partly to aid memory in public or private recitation.

Its aim was to provide instruction in the faith and how to live well, through adherence to the Torah, the law ( and moral will) of God, for the safety and well-being of all. (As in our call to collaborate with lockdown this year).

As is common in the Hebrew language the same word may have different meanings, each to be interpreted in context, so 'torah' usually translated as law can refer to a decree, precept, statute, commandment, ordinance, word, or promise. The Psalmist seeks to persuade the readers or listeners to lead their lives in a particular way, or walk particular path, with a spiritual buoyancy; finding the conduct that will lead to living in the 'right way'.

None of these verses contain specific injunctions invoking the Ten Commandments, the laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Rather, 'torah' is here presented as a way of life that brings one closer to God.

The Psalmist makes number of petitions, 'teach', 'give me understanding,' 'lead me', 'turn my heart' etc. The word 'fear' (v.38) appears many times in the Bible and some people have a problem with it. Does it mean we should be frightened or intimidated by God? Or does it mean we hold God in awe and wonder. Or, does it mean simply that we should treat God with utmost seriousness? Fear, therefore, is about attentiveness towards God. As Proverb 1.7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

So what wisdom and instruction should we seek to deal with the climate emergency? Clearly, we need to consume less and choose more low-carbon alternatives. If we eat less meat and consume more greens this should lead us to a healthier lifestyle. Giving up flying is a bold decision but rectifies the gap between our values and actions. Redemptive actions can get the attention of family and friends, yet, ultimately, can have a virulent effect in our communities. We need a new acrostic: simple to understand, easy to follow.

Our God is not a God of arbitrary rules and regulations. God gave the Israelites a means for living as God's people, not to restrict them, but to free them to be the people of God. We too are looking for a fresh start, freed from the bondage of a consumerist lifestyle of vain imaginings in a shop window or on-line screen. We too need to implore God to teach, give, lead, and turn us in subtle ways so that we can become faithful servants, creative collaborators with God and each other, if we are to avoid the 'disgrace' that we dread.

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# Romans 13.8–14

Rev Alex Mabbs:



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

Urgency is no cause to set aside justice: quite the contrary.

In verse 8, Paul continues his theme of paying your dues from verse 7, which itself moves from debts of money to debts of virtue (respect and honour). Verse 8 repeats but deepens this same structure, with love being the ultimate (and only) debt to remain. It may be that Paul has in mind the encouragement of the Lord's Prayer to forgive debts. Any money-based economy is built on debt; perhaps Paul is arguing for a changed basis for our life together, where love is the top priority and all else is built on that love for others. Verses 8-10 recall Jesus in Luke 18.18ff, where he uses the first three of these commandments, in the same order, and then goes on to tell the rich ruler to sell all his possessions and give to the poor.

Time and again, the bible writers insist on applying faith to finance.

These verses also recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 22.34-40, in which Jesus sums up the law and the prophets in two commandments to love: loving God and loving neighbour. Jesus there says that all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments and here Paul says that love for neighbour fulfils the law. Neither Paul nor Jesus seem to argue for replacing the law's specific commandments with an alternative ethic of love. Rather, love is the rationale for the law, whose commandments show how love can be expressed not just for a few neighbours but for all, including justice and care for the poorest, for animals and even for the land, addressing life from every angle, including the sabbatical commands concerning debt and the structure of the economy (e.g. Leviticus 25). That is why love is the fulfilment of the law.

Verses 11-14 inject a sense of urgency. Paul hasn't written this letter for endless discussion, or for referral to a committee, to report years ahead. It's a call to action now: to live the life of Jesus today. It's a call to live out our new lives in Christ as if his day had already dawned. Verses 12 and 13 have this sense of living as if in daylight while the night has not yet passed, letting our lives now be shaped by our hope in the world to come. There are echoes here of 8.9-17, where the Spirit gives us, now, the life of the resurrection as children of God and joint heirs with Christ of the glory that is to come. Verse 14 may help us understand how we can do this. The instruction to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' is similar to that in Galatians 3.27 where baptism clothes us with Christ. Paul's language in these verses may indicate a daily spiritual practice of clothing oneself with Christ and his light. Surely the alternative of gratifying the desires of the flesh (v.14), including holding onto grudges and debts, is how we end up in a climate and environmental crisis.

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## **Matthew 18.15–20**

**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.**

There are times when the Bible gets approached as an instruction book: we find the bit we want, the verses that resonate with our prejudice or political aims, and with a triumphant "Aha!" feel vindicated. The need for a more nuanced approach is well-known, including a) allowing for development of understanding within the Bible; b) seeing verses in the wider context of revelation in the whole Bible; c) alertness to the context when a text was written and d) allowing the Spirit to speak through the Bible into our own contexts. As I look at this passage following these tracks, a warning light is flashing... I write this sitting alone (in lockdown).... This passage itself says that true wis-

dom comes in the gathered community, and discernment comes with the presence of Christ where two or more are together. It is then that the community can discern what is destructive or creative; the latter discernment leading into their prayer and other actions.

This passage is written from the early Church, a community sometimes having to deal with wrongdoers. Expelling someone as “a pagan or a tax collector” echoes the Jewish culture of those times..... after all these are the marginalised people whom Jesus had chosen to move among. We see in Acts and the Epistles how the early Church had difficulties reconciling their Judaism with the experience that the Spirit was also given to all people.

In this text the goal is to restore the wrongdoer to the community, to restore relationship. The wrongdoing is not specified as being against the person identifying the need for correction. It might be, or the harm might be done to the community or its resources, or its ability to sustain itself or to be missionary disciples.

In our times, we have been forced to a new and wonderfully enriched view of our own core relationships: we are a part of a glorious yet vulnerable Earth, a gift to all people. It is to the poor, to future generations, to the Earth’s ability to sustain healthy life and to its inherent preciousness that so much current wrongdoing does harm. The wrongdoers are often not individuals – but international corporations and global economic structures. Where is the forum that can hold these to account? The UN and International Criminal Court are undermined and attacked by isolationist, self-seeking powers. Can we challenge governments so that these organisations are reinvigorated, given effective power, and protected? We should also hold corporations to account, including by morally responsible investment, demanding corporations repair the damage they cause. Such action is vital, but not enough.

This passage might prompt us to reassess our own relationships including with the Earth. It invites us to join together in commitment to pray for and with creation; to live more simply, and to discern how we can advocate and act to protect our common home [2].

## Refs

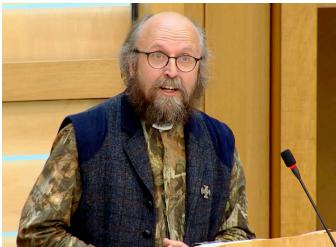
[1] John McKenzie, Jerome Biblical Commentary 43:128

[2] The “Laudato Si” pledge, <http://livelaudatosi.org/>

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# Sermon ideas

( Three suggestions for this first week: pick what works best for you)



**1)Rev David Coleman**  
**Environmental Chaplain with EcoCongregation**  
**Scotland,**  
**Member of the Iona Community,**

As we begin this year's Creation Time/Season of Creation, turning in faith to the various readings, we discover how love, forgiveness and faithfulness are utterly prominent in the calling of humanity to be partners with the rest of Creation, the fellow participants in God's Covenant. We don't need to dig for 'green references' in a Bible immersed in the life and the care of the Earth, "in which Christ became incarnate" (Iona Community Communion service).

'Seasons' have given us regularity, though seasons, even when reflected in ceremony, are not confined to dates in a diary. The disruption of migration, growing, and harvest seasons prompts us to a greater respect for the fragility of everything we might have taken for granted - our traditional interpretation of the Scriptures included, along with the 'eternity' of the rocks and the seas. In Exodus 12, regulations clearly designed for the long haul, are nonetheless clearly designed to mitigate against complacency: the tradition is observed by the trappings of urgency, rather than or relaxed reassurance. A very valuable learning point for our day and age.

Whilst we always learn from the Scriptures, this needs to include the freedom to be outraged by the gleeful unforgiveness of Psalm 149, even when 'the poor are adorned with victory'. Under no circumstance should followers of Christ feel an obligation to hatred, 'because it says so in the Bible'.

The love of the 'Law' in Psalm 119 needs also to be taken carefully. 'Torah' is the moral will of God, and thus reminder (2 Corinthians 3) that that 'the letter kills, the Spirit gives life' is not inconsistent with a thoughtful and discerning approach even to the most revered of texts: indeed, this is the way they are best honoured, rather than in crass, 'blind' following. Romans 13: "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

A thread of responsibility runs through the passages: but not the responsibility of rulers undergirded by coercive power. For Ezekiel, the predicament of the prophet is this: that without power or authority, nonetheless, they bear responsibility for speaking out and warning their fellow citizens of danger.

That survival and rehabilitation is more important to God than following through the results of self-destructive decisions is a valuable message.

Then, finally, in the Gospel “manual for church order” of Matthew 18, the value of responsible witnesses, as well as of seeking to avoid the escalation of divisive situations is placed before us here.

Climate science offers a ***testimony*** which we can take note of or ignore. There's also a sting in the tail for the complacent here, in the instruction to treat offenders” as a Gentile and a tax-collector” - that is, as those in particular need of support to change their mind and ways. The aim is always reconciliation, not exclusion.

Globally, we don't have anywhere else to go; nowhere to send our offenders away to.

And might we be these offenders?



2) Patsy Thomson:  
**Ordinand: in training for ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church**

(Maybe we need to be aware of the centrality of sacrificial meals in the culture in which the Bible arose, which made sacrifice so central to Jewish and Christian memorial imagery. Of course, this would currently be controversial, recognising the cultural dissonance for many)

Where and how are God's people and God's creation enslaved today? Who is Pharaoh? What 'plagues' people and environments? And what might we learn from the experience of this year? Keep an eye on the news. What are the dangers and uncertainties we face? How can we gird up our individual and community loins and start on a journey of liberation? How do we leave our old identity (gung-ho wasteful exploiters of the planet, obsessed with GDP) and prepare in these liminal times for a new identity as thoughtful, sustainable earth citizens attuned to the needs of all God's creation? How do we learn, in the way that Pharaoh tried not to?

Concentrating on a sense of unjust entrapment of peoples and marine and animal landlife can lead us to find examples of disempowered, vulnerable populations and places very much at risk of the plague of floods, fires and natural disasters (which the press routinely describes as being “of Biblical proportions”. ) You could ask your congregation what are the plagues they see in the world and environment around them? overconsumption and waste, plastic and pollution, homelessness and inequality? mental illness and addiction?

We are people of Easter hope who stand ready to be delivered. Ready to start on Day One of a New Year. Ready to commit to changes in how we live. How can we work alongside God to create a community of redemption among us? What are do-able small changes for us as we set off, from this church service on our journey. Offer some examples of how we can recycle more, reuse more, reduce our individual and church carbon footprint. Though these are encouragements, rather than ‘badges of office’. Every Sunday we remember God’s love for all creation, God’s grace in redeeming us, God’s gift of a new start.



### 3) From Hannah Brown

**Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer for the Joint Public Issues Team.**

The climate crisis is one of the starker warnings we have ever heard as a global community. Whilst the warning signs have been growing for decades, the science and the stories of those on the frontline of environmental change have been getting stronger and clearer by the month. Reading Ezekiel 33:7-11 in

this light invites us to consider how we hear and respond to this collective threat.

From the different perspectives the passage offers us, we can hear different messages. Firstly, the role of the prophet. It is not the prophet’s job to shape how people respond. In fact, as we know from later in the passage, this is the work of God, who offers partnership in renewal and response. But the prophet has a responsibility to share the call of danger with the people, that they might hear and realise their own place within it.

As the Church, a global body with brothers and sisters around the world feeling acutely the impact of the climate crisis, what is our role in sharing this message? If we have begun to highlight this issue – are we doing enough? The warning to Ezekiel from God is clear – this is a heavy responsibility. He must play his part in moving the people to change.

But he realises God's part also – to offer mercy. As the Church speaks out alongside the other prophets of our time warning us of the dangers of the climate crisis, how can we make sure this message of mercy is heard too? Next, we step into the shoes of the people of Israel, hearing the warning of the prophet. The prophet has stood watch, and has heard from God the warnings of danger for the community.

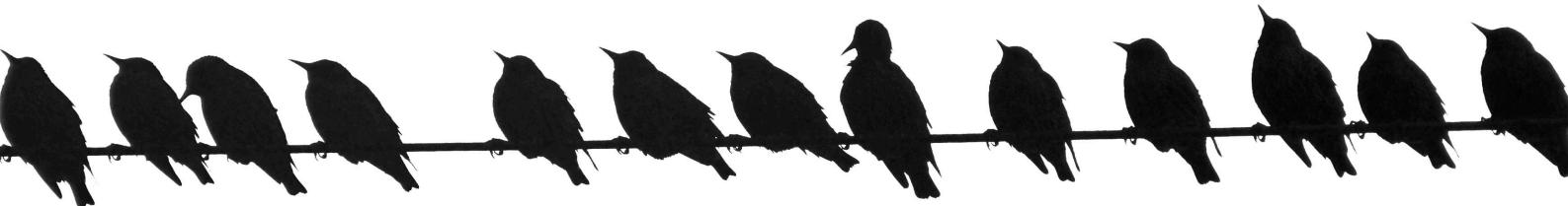
Who are our prophets today? From whom have we heard the warnings of the climate crisis? It could be communities in the global south, on the frontline of the climate crisis and feeling its effects acutely. Where has their vulnerability to disaster been a warning that our global community was at risk?

Has it been activists, who have been campaigning on this issue for years? New voices such as Greta Thunberg's might have broken through the noise, but have we heard what they have to say?

Or, is creation itself the prophetic voice we need to hear? Should we be listening to the pain of wildfires, flooding, tsunamis and earthquakes?

The passage not only calls us to hear these prophets, but respond. The cry of the people of Israel is a collective one. It suggests that the danger these prophets warn of is one in which we are all complicit. We waste away because of our transgressions and sins. Looking at the climate crisis, how is this a call to realise and lament our own part in this threat to creation?

However, the passage does not leave us here. God responds to the cries of Israel with mercy. God expresses no delight in punishment for those who do not respond to their own guilt – he does not offer 'dead end' solutions. Instead, God is more interested in repentance and renewal. Through the prophetic warning and realisation of danger, God offers an invitation for change. How might we take this up today, in the light of the climate crisis?



# **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.*

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**1) *Spirit of God, unseen as the wind*, by Margaret V. Old, 1932-2001.**

*-Set to the Skye Boat Song, this connects scripture and the guidance of the Spirit with the need for urgent change.*

Source: e.g. CH4 600

**2) *Whoever lives beside the Lord* , by John L.Bell..**

*A setting of Psalm 91 ( though you may like to look for settings of the psalms above) which does not deny the threats that we face, though looks to God’s solidarity in the midst of it all.*

Source: e.g. Common Ground 146, Psalms of Patience, Protest & Praise ( Wild Goose, also on CD)

**3) *Teach me, my God and king, in all things thee to see* , by George Herbert**

An insightful poem, emphasising the dignity, and the equivalence with prayer, of small steps of commitment and action.

Source: e.g. *Rejoice & Sing* 538

4) ***My life flows on in endless song*** By Robert Lowry (1822-1899) & Doris Plenn. A very spiritual and enjoyable song, acknowledging the "lamentation" of the earth. This is the spirituality we need to face the crises in which we are mired.

Source: e.g. CH4 565

5) ***For the fruits of all creation***, by Fred Pratt Green. Though this harvest hymn is clearly written before consciousness of the current environmental crises, the expression of gratitude, and an appreciation of the magnitude of the task of caring, should be encouraging. Take 'neighbour' a wee bit wider than just your human neighbour.

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**New writing: Hymn poem.**

**For Climate Sunday: (September 6th this year)**

**Now Christ lives here as he promised**

The promise of Jesus to prepare a place where his friends can be with him (John 14:3) need not be taken by default as being 'post-mortem': 'Where Christ lives' is in the midst of Community, engaged in friendship and partnership with Creation.

Festivals and 'special' days, like Climate Sunday, with which this year's Creation time will begin, rightly help deepen our faith and commitment.

Tune laid out here to go with the tune 'Courage, brother, do not stumble' (CH4 513) otherwise 8787D E.g Blaenwern, Abbot's Leigh, Beach Spring, Converse. Choose a tune which really carries your congregation.

1) Now Christ lives here  
as he promised,  
having once prepared the place:  
Now we live as kingdom people

shaped, re-shaped at frightening pace;  
Now, whilst still we live and struggle  
Justice and Earth's voice speak loud  
Now immersed in this day's trouble  
Humble friends [**3xJ**] of Christ are proud!

2) Now the scriptures find their meaning:  
told, re-told, refined by toil.  
Choking air may yet be fragrant;  
Fertile our degraded soil  
Now the teaching we have sidestepped:  
Love for all we can't evade:  
Grace, forgiveness sets us free, in  
joy to live [**3xJ**] as Jesus prayed.

3) Now and for our lives remaining;  
Laurels offer feeble rest.  
Times and seasons shape commitment  
By immediacy blessed.  
Be not tempted by 'Good Old Days'  
Now, the days of Christ are best  
Christ incarnate in Earth's family  
Flesh and blood, [**3xJ**] God, manifest.

4) Yeast in dough and shining city  
Salt for Earth and light for all  
Not as domineering tyrants  
but as friends for this long-haul!  
Every day, the chance to follow  
Not one step we walk in vain;  
Green our God is, sending Spirit:  
energy [**3xJ**] from buried grain.



## 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.***

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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 reshape 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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<sup>1</sup> 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 re-alise 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.'

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# 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?



**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

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# Romans 14.1–12



**Rev Rodolphe Blanchard-Cowal**

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

"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."

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## 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 through 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 Hopeman 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.

e.g. consider Exodus 14-15 from the perspective of an Egyptian widow; or a sea creature; or the sea itself (as personified in Psalm 114)

e.g. Genesis 50 from the perspective of a frightened brother

e.g. Matthew 18 as either slave's wife; or from a country paying financial debts at the expense of healthcare/education/land/water; or from a nation endangered by climate change to whom we owe an enormous climate debt. (see Debt Justice and Climate Justice at Christian Aid or Tearfund, or Jubilee Scotland)

e.g. Romans 14 from someone trying to work out what to eat to reduce their impact on the Earth (eat local meat/vegetarian/vegan?); or someone who has no choice of food because their land is no longer productive, the rains have changed or water gone (see Christian Aid or Tearfund)

### **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).

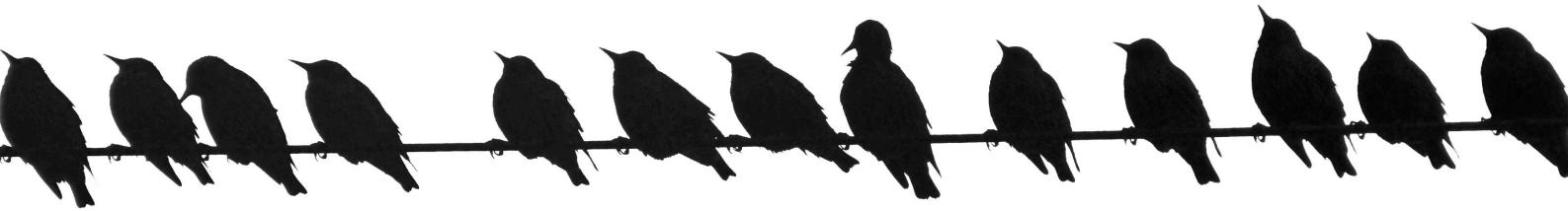
It has been said that the church is full of hypocrites, but there's always room for more. We all fall short when we try to live in God's ways, in creation care as in everything else. These different texts challenge how we deal with failings and hypocrisy, in ourselves or others.

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.

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## **MUSIC AND PRAISE**

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

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

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### **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*

Source: e.g. CH4 122

### **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 138

### **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.

### **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 infected”. 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!



# 20TH SEPTEMBER: WEEK 3:

## Prayers.



**Dr Pat Bennett** has a dual background in science and theology and a particular interest in the connections between relational experience, health, and flourishing. She is a member of the Iona Community and regularly produces liturgical and theological resources for them, for Wild Goose Publications, and for the Spirituality of Conflict project ([spirituality-ofconflict.com](http://spirituality-ofconflict.com))

## Notes

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

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

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

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

## Opening responses

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

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

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

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

## Approach

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

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

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

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

## **Thanksgiving**

God -

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

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

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

God -

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

## **Confession**

(to be said by all)

God of challenge and change  
the stories from your word  
show us how great the gap can sometimes be  
between divine and human economies.

Forgive us  
when we have let attachment  
to our own comfort and convenience  
deter us from committing to the costly transitions  
necessary for the wellbeing of our planet  
and the flourishing of all its inhabitants

*silence or a kyrie*

God of compassion and concern  
the stories from your word  
show us how great the gap can sometimes be  
between divine and human tenderness.

Forgive us  
when we have let attachment  
to our own understandings of justice and righteousness

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

*silence or a kyrie*

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

*silence or a kyrie*

## **Assurance of forgiveness**

*Either*

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

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

**Amen**

**or**

**Minister**

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

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

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

## **Collect**

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

## **Blessing**

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

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## Framework for prayer of Intercession in Creation Time



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

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

Let us pray with Christ:

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

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

### **for the world**

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

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

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

### **for the church**

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

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

### **for ourselves**

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

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

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

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

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

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## **Exodus 16.2–15**



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Psalm 105.1–6, 37–45



**Rev Rodolphe Blanchard-Cowal**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Jonah 3.10 – 4.11



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## ***Psalm 145.1-8***



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# Philippians 1.21–30

Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.



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

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

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

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

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# Matthew 20.1–16



Hannah Brown.

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

## Scripture passage overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# **Sermon ideas:**

## **Rev Alex Mabbs:**



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Further research:**

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

Kate Raworth on 'Doughnut Economics': [https://www.ted.com/talks/kate\\_raworth\\_a\\_healthy\\_economy\\_should\\_be\\_designed\\_to\\_thrive\\_not\\_grow](https://www.ted.com/talks/kate_raworth_a_healthy_economy_should_be_designed_to_thrive_not_grow)

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## **MUSIC AND PRAISE**

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

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

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

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

Source, e.g. CH4 137

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

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

Source, e.g. CH4 229

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

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

Source e.g. CH4 497

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

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

Source: e.g. CH4 103

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

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

Source e.g. CH4 224

## New writing: Hymn poem.

### Deep our longing to dwell with you

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

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

1)Deep our longing to dwell with you

Christ our risen, present, Friend:

Gawping up to boundless heavens  
choosing not to comprehend;

that where need, injustice, threaten,  
yours are hands that reach for aid.

2)You rejoice in flesh as Jesus;

share the blood, the breath the clay:

building blocks of cells and bodies;  
vibrantly entwined today.

Neighbours' needs in many species  
constantly your face display.

3)We deceive ourselves, if loving

"god" at cost of blessed Earth.

Food and drink and warmth and loving,

Tears and joy and death and birth;

All we need to live in your House:

Here and now: Christ offers worth.

4) Jesus taught the prayer converging

"World-as-is" with "Earth-to-be";

Love, without exception; justice

wise compassion, debtors free.

Not deserving; just responding

grants God's solidarity



# 27TH SEPTEMBER: WEEK 4:

## Prayers.



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## Notes

These prayers are based on motifs and themes found in the lectionary readings (and their alternates) for Proper 21 (Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost). I have tried to write them in a way which will work with whichever of the OT readings are used. The thing that struck me as I read these texts was that they all, in some way or other, relate to foundational stories - the things which (knowingly or unknowingly) inform and shape our sense of who we are whether as individuals, families, political or religious groupings. Many of the huge issues with which we are grappling in 2020 - climate change and the emergence of Covid19 among them - deeply challenge some of the narratives which we take as 'givens' and ask us to reflect critically on whether they are helpful, necessary, or indeed even true - and whether we need to reimagine the world and our own identity and actions within it. Just as the Gospel does in fact!

## Practicalities

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

and 'they' as alternative personal pronouns to 'he' and 'his' with respect to God.

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

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

In the blessing there is also a 'you/we/us/' alternative.

## **Opening responses**

L: We meet in the name of God

V1: whose speech began the story of life

V2: whose words brought form into being

All: and who ordered creation in harmony and goodness.

L: We meet in the purpose of Jesus

V1: whose life was the speech of God

V2: whose words show the shape of his Kingdom

All: and who draws those who hear into its unfolding story.

L: We meet in the power of the Spirit

V1: whose breath tamed the primordial chaos

W: whose tongue shapes the words of change

All: and who energises the ones who give them voice.

L: We meet in the name of the Triune God

the Source, the Sharer, and the Shaper,

All: Who was, and is, and will be

as long as the Story of Love is told.

## **Approach**

L: God, in the story of your people  
on their journey through the wilderness

All: we see and hear many things  
which we know and recognise.

L: God, in the words of your Son  
as he journeyed through life

All: we see and hear many things  
which challenge our cherished ideas.

L: God, in the passage of your Spirit  
as she journeys through history

All: we see and hear many things  
which show us that change is possible.

L: God, constantly present in human story,  
we open ourselves  
to all that you would show us now  
though worship and song  
word and prayer  
(bread and wine)

All: Meet us where we are  
show us where we need to be  
and then go with us as we move.

## **Thanksgiving**

*we say together -*

God the Source  
we give you thanks that,  
from the very beginning,  
you have been part of creation -  
inextricably woven into its story;  
feeling its glory and greyness;  
knowing its potentials and possibilities...

Jesus the Sharer  
we give you thanks that,  
through your humble Incarnation,  
you became part of the human story -  
inextricably woven into its experiences;  
feeling its delights and dilemmas;  
knowing its potentials and possibilities...

Spirit the Shaper

we give you thanks that,  
throughout all stories of human history,  
you have been part of the arc towards justice -  
inextricably woven into its trajectory;  
feeling its freedoms and frustrations;  
knowing its potentials and possibilities...

Triune Three -  
Source, Sharer, and Shaper,  
we give you thanks that,  
though we may not understand you,  
yet  
you understand us and our stories  
and help us  
discover and explore their potential  
and enter and engage with their possibilities

## **Confession**

O God  
you intended the world to be a place  
of provision and plenty for all.  
We confess that sometimes  
in our attitudes or actions  
we have taken more than we need  
at the expense of others.  
Forgive us,  
and by your Spirit  
help us as we try to live differently  
in the week ahead.

*Silence or kyrie*

O God  
you intended the world to be a place  
of fairness and flourishing for all.  
We confess that sometimes  
in our attitudes and actions  
we have lived as though

we alone mattered.  
Forgive us,  
and by your Spirit  
help us as we try to live differently  
in the week ahead.

*Silence or kyrie*

O God  
you intended the world to be a place  
in which all play their part  
in the health and wholeness of creation.  
We confess that sometimes  
in our attitudes and actions  
we have avoided our responsibilities  
or prevented others from fulfilling theirs.  
Forgive us,  
and by your Spirit  
help us as we try to live differently  
in the week ahead.

*Silence or kyrie*

## **Assurance of forgiveness**

*Either*

**All: God**  
**the life and words of your Son -**  
**his compassion and care for others**  
**even as he himself was dying**  
**assure us**  
**of the generous depths**  
**of your forgiveness**  
**and of its restorative power.**

**Help us now**  
**through the energy of your Spirit**  
**to love and live differently,**  
**that we, and our world,**  
**might become**  
**all that you intended.**

**Amen**

*or*

### **Leader**

The life and words of Jesus  
even as he was dying  
assure you/us  
of the generous depths  
of God's forgiveness  
and of its restorative power.

Through the energy of the Spirit  
may God help you/us now  
to love and live differently,  
that you/we and this world  
might become  
all that he/they intended.

Amen

### **Collect**

God - Source, Sharer, Shaper -  
though you have many names  
your story moves constantly and consistently  
towards a world  
in which all can flourish  
as you intended.  
Help us to grow in clear-sightedness  
of how our own names or narratives  
can hinder our understandings  
of your love and purpose,  
that we may join more fully  
in the story of your Kingdom.  
Amen

### **Blessing**

May the God whose names are many

but whose nature is constant,  
the One whose story is complex,  
but whose purpose is clear,  
enable you/us to deepen in love,  
develop in understanding,  
and be determined in action

that you/we and the world you/we inhabit  
can move ever nearer  
to that which God intends.  
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 17:1-7**

*Rev Jenny Adams:*



*Trustee of EcoCongregation Scotland,*

*and Church of Scotland Minister: Duffus, Spynie and  
Hopeman Parish.*

**This story is one of a series which can be seen as rebellions or tests of the Hebrew people, which get increasingly exhausted responses from Moses and gracious**

**provision by God. These relate to many of the most basic needs of human beings: clean safe water (15:22-27 and here), food (16), and security (17:8-16) – not unreasonable things to raise with those in leadership.**

There is an increasing threat to those basic needs because of the climate emergency – access to safe water is reduced by shrinking glaciers, disrupted rainfall patterns, drought and floods. Those threats clearly affect access to food, and conflict over water brings security risks. God's desire to see those needs met should influence our lifestyle & policy choices.

There are also familiar dynamics at work, when a difficult situation finds people seeking someone to blame and someone who should do something to fix it. Here the people attribute blame to Moses, either choosing to ignore the agency of God in their situation or avoiding a more difficult discussion. Faced with the many challenges on the Earth, we all face the temptation to either blame others, expect someone else (governments, corporations) to fix it, or avoid facing up to a difficult bigger picture.

One way of considering the story would be as a movie scene:

Cast of characters: within the story, Moses and the narrator recognise the active involvement of Moses, the people, a group of elders within the people, and the Lord. However, the people do not appear to acknowledge the agency of the Lord in this episode, directing all their questions and complaints at Moses alone.

Location: this is a stop on a journey from the wilderness of Sin (picture a movie montage or map?). It is clearly rocky and dry. The reference in verse 6 to the rock at Horeb places it at the Mountain of God, though 19:2 suggests there is further journeying to get there – the editor may have used some poetic licence in ordering scenes. (Horeb and Sinai are both used for the Mountain in Exodus.)

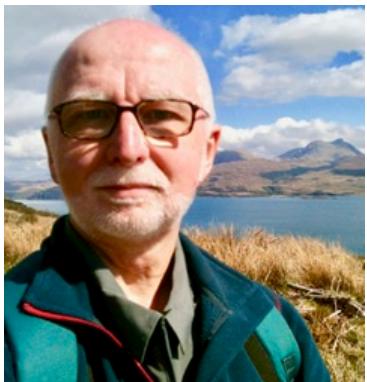
Timeline: a) The use of the staff which struck the Nile (v5) could bring flashbacks to 4:1-5 then 7:14-21 (and more). These were actions meant to demonstrate who the Lord was – to Moses as well as to Pharaoh. 7:14-21 is a mirror image of 17:1-7, as then the water was made undrinkable, here those with nothing to drink are given clear water.

b) There are also glimpses forward. The Lord goes ahead of Moses to the rock at Horeb, looking ahead to the greater revelation of the Law on the Mountain, meeting another fundamental need of the people, to know God's ways.

# Psalm 78.1-4, 12-16

Richard Murray:

**Lay reader in the Scottish Episcopal Church, and trustee of EcoCongregation Scotland**



The beginning of Psalm 78 is unusual because it is not addressed to God but to "my people," placing it within the wisdom traditions of the Hebrew Bible.

The psalm is often called historical, recounting the story of God's care of Israel in the wilderness, and Israel's woeful response. But the poem does not follow a chronological order because this is not the aim of the Psalmist, who calls it a "parable" to give it importance, with "dark sayings" or mysteries or riddles, giving it enigmatic dimensions. The poet is full of wonder. It's the re-telling of a story, figuratively.

The Mosaic stories are the geographical setting for the theological understanding of God's covenantal guardianship and tutelage of rebellious humanity. Israel's vocation was to be a distinct and representative presence in the world, contemplating the world, and mediating and upholding the presence of God in the world. However, Israel rebelled against God, for they quickly forgot that, in the wilderness, the basic essentials of life, both bodily and spiritual needs, were provided for them by God's act of free grace.

How can we re-imagine the text and bridge the gulf between the ancient religious world and our contemporary secular world so that we can learn how to trust in God and not forget the divine teaching? We share some things in common. The wilderness wanderings of the Israelites, as re-told by the Psalmist, come from the perspective not of a desert-dweller but of one who had become domesticated; notions of wilderness and lostness were counterintuitive and their agricultural economy was dependent on the God of Israel. When they felt that God had let them down, they put their faith in other gods and the work of their own hands.

Our contemporary 'chaos' has come about through our materialistic daily living. The causes of climate change and the spread of Covid-19 are a consequence of our actions. In a sense, God is inviting us back into the wilderness to be tested, to hold us to account, to hear again the spirit of wisdom. But to argue that our current situation is divine punishment would be a misinterpretation.

Punishment implies a judicial process, so where's the justice in the disproportionate effect that this existential crisis is having on the vulnerable, the poor and the marginalised?

God is not punishing us. This is not divine wrath. The God of Jesus feels and suffers with us. We are being called to face up to what we have done. We are living in a world that is part of God's dominion, so we must become participants in a new creativity that will bring us through the chaos of the waters, standing like a 'heap' ready to engulf us. The key lesson is that our systems of life, our economics and our politics are being tested and that we need to re-learn God's wisdom to discover the route to a sustainable and healthy world.

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## Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32



**Patsy Thomson:**  
**Warden of Lay Readers for Moray, Ross & Caithness Diocese of the Scottish Episcopal Church**

### **Initial comment**

"Leaning into the green" - enough with the climate change excuses, already! Don't dare escape into collective fatalism. It's up to each one of us to act now to avoid environmental ruin.

No good pointing helpless, hopeless fingers at past perpetrators of crimes against the planet. "We're all doomed" won't cut it. Indefensible/immoral to write off our responsibility for the environmental mess we are in. Time to take action to make things better for future generations. Stop dwelling on the incremental, death-dealing tragedy of climate change - turn away from contributing to all the degradation and pollution, and live. We've to get ourselves a new heart and a new spirit pronto.

### **Scriptural overview**

Ezekiel - a seriously weird, grotesque and tantalising book, and that's the verdict of serious biblical scholars! the . Throughout the book, Ezekiel the priest/prophet exhibits what we might prematurely diagnose as signs of mental illness. These are not to be written off, but rather it should be realised that the extreme nature of the language and imagery results from the sense of urgency for change which makes these scriptures relevant and appropriate for our day and world.

Ezekiel sees himself as witness to (sentinel over) Israel writes in exile in Babylon.

Ezekiel responds to the Isrealite tradition that “the sins of the parents are visited upon the children” by arguing each individual is responsible for his/her sins. The question of responsibility would have been crucial during the Exile. The sour grapes proverb handily deflects responsibility into the past, in a tone of complacent self-pity. But now is the time for the people to get themselves “a new heart”. The text is grounded in “the land of Israel” but calls to “the house of Israel”- how we treat one another and our environment - inextricably linked and interdependent .

This chapter identifies **collective** sins as the problem. This is pertinent for an assessment of our global emergencies. A fixation on small individual misdemeanours can mean we miss the point. Repentance is not a matter of bearing guilt as a burden, neither is it the cultivation of remorse or regret. Instead, it is the first step toward transformation -- what Ezekiel calls getting a new heart and a new spirit. Repentance is an active, deliberate step in a new direction. It is a step into the future, into life itself.

Ezekiel nonetheless gives value to the individual as a moral agent and the present moment as the moment of moral significance. Like our small-scale environmental initiatives, righteous action is not pointless as some of the exiles claim(33.10).Ezekiel articulates a responsibility and opportunity for each individual to “turn and live” on the basis of new choices and righteous acts.

Ezekiel leads us into reflection on what we have begun to see as “Generational justice’ - as well as the longing of many in our own generations that those who follow after them might bless, rather than curse our current conduct in the face of emergency. This gives context to our reading of this conversation of the Prophet with a God giving every opportunity for a change of course, but stopping short of making the decision for a people hell-bent on catastrophe, whilst blaming everyone else.

The key question, then, from an incredulous God: “Why will you die, O house of Israel?”

Why choose what you know is the wrong path?

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## Psalm 25.1–9



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

Perhaps this is one of those many parts of scripture which have given comfort through the identification of emotional and national turmoil, rather than offering an exemplary outlook on life, or a model of robust

and gracious worship. Even the grim verses of the book of Lamentations - because in them people still think it's worth crying out to God when all rational hope seems gone - are now helping encourage and sustain folk in places where environmental damage has permanently disrupted daily life.

Reassurance seems far from the hopes of this desperate, immature, and fragile singer, needing to be able to rely on forgiveness, vulnerable to embarrassment and looking, perhaps rather too much, for God to do everything for them; even holding God to account on the off chance that God will turn out to be the God they hoped God might be. All of this, we hear and assess.

*The Psalms here offer us a role-play to learn about some of the deepest, and not always most admirable parts of who we are under pressure. But role playing comes into its own when we also take care with the de-brief. In this song, we feel what it's like. Then, thank God, we can also come to ourselves.*

*As a poem preserved with reverence over centuries, its naked emotional honesty is almost too much to bear. The singer even grovelingly hopes to win favour by cursing the enemies of God.*

*Maybe at the end of the Psalm, when the singer had run out of this barrage of protective and defensive words, they might have been able to hear the loving, forgiving, enabling voice of God. Our widely shared predicament is the feeling of helplessness. Which is both realistic, as regards 'solutions', but far from it, as regards the value of our commitment and participation in the care of Creation.*

*Finding texts such as this in our Holy Scriptures, we realise that 'it's all right not to be all right', and that if that's the case, then there's every reason to turn to God, as and when and how we are right now.*

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## Philippians 2.1–13



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

At the core of this reading is the well-known 'Christ Hymn' of verses 6-11. It's tempting to rush headlong into the hymn and so miss the wisdom in the verses that enclose it. The whole passage advocates humble service, but while the great example of Christ's humility is, well, exemplary, the surrounding verses give us some clues about how we ordinary Christians can follow that great example.

Paul, in chapter 1 of the letter, has used his own suffering to encourage the Philippian Christians in their hardships. Now, in 2.1-2, he urges them to have the same mind as him, in love, fellowship in the Spirit, compassion and sympathy. These are virtues that can be chosen, but if they feel too abstract, in v.3 Paul contrasts ambition and pride with the humility that regards others as better than one's self, choosing to serve the interests of others. From attitude to action, this is how the readers of this letter can, like Paul, find hope and courage in the face of adversity.

There is a contrast between these verses and the hubris that can come out of, say, Genesis 1.26ff and Psalm 8.5-8. Indeed, once Paul moves from his own example to that of Jesus ("have the same mind" – vv.2, 5), the resonances with the early chapters of Genesis are stronger. In Eden, Adam and Eve grasp at becoming like God, as do the people of Babel. There, ambition and pride are followed by fall and loss as they exploit their power to serve their own interests. In the case of Jesus, the trajectory is opposite. Starting in the form of God, he refused to use that for his own advantage. Instead he emptied himself, humbling himself to human form and a shameful death, which resulted in his exaltation. Jesus restores the proper place of humanity in creation: to serve the good of all. Adam and Eve were appointed to tend and keep the garden – they were there for Eden, it wasn't there for them. The same principle was true of Abraham (blessed to be a blessing, Genesis 12.2-3), Israel ("a priestly kingdom", Exodus 19.6) and it was chosen by Jesus. It is the calling of those who would follow him.

It is this laying aside of hubris and ambition and instead acting in open-handed humility to serve the good of others, that is the way of salvation for all creation. This may be what Paul means by vv.12-13, as he reminds his readers that God is at work in their work of service, resulting in God's good pleasure – perhaps another echo of Genesis 1, where all creation flourishing as God intended invokes God's response: "It is very good."

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## Matthew 21.23–32

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



*Today we are privileged to read one of the immensely significant body of stories of Jesus, effectively yelling "Get on with it!" to those who ought to know better than to keep things as they are.*

*As this passage shows, arguing about matters of authority when the truth is staring you in the face is not likely to get us very far.*

*This year we can add to this how dangerous it might be to long that we return, after such acute crises as we have encountered in recent months to "the way things always were." Change is inevitable and irrevocable. We "get used to that", or perish. We are not even the same people, or the same churches we were at the beginning of this year. And it matters not to whom we might appeal to give us an excuse to deny this.*

*Power and privilege, in religion as in politics, can entrench the status quo, and hinder the vital responsiveness that goes with the leadership of any sustainable society.*

*Talking the talk is often an effective way of avoiding walking the walk. It's true that in recent years the church has learned to talk positively about 'Creation' and about 'stewardship' as if our fellow creatures were mere property that we were paid to take care of. The science is sufficiently clear, authoritative, and prominent : if you want to survive in time of crisis, the status quo has to go.*

*And yet, outside movements like Eco Congregation and Eco-church, the sacrificial lead is being given by young climate strikers and non-violent protest. But not just 'of human origin', but from God, is the mandate, expressed in covenant, to be responsible, as one might of a long-standing family business, and not merely as an employee, for what we are part of: the entirety of the World that God so loves that he gave his only Son....*

*In Jesus' response to the attack on his credentials, we also note that those most marginalised (the tax-collectors and prostitutes) may also be the most responsive to the pressures to change. Those we most despise may be the ones to watch, when we're seeking direction. Or those, in poverty, and on the sharp end of climate change, who have 'nothing to lose but their chains'.*

*Finally: trust, explore and test your own inspiration and reaction to Scripture, as also to world events: as a Christian writer on environmental matters, it's frequently frustrating that so few, even amongst scholars, are prepared to stop beating around the bush and take the risk of coming out with what they think and feel. It seems Jesus had the same problem. But here, he is equal to it!*

## Sermon ideas



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

As Creation Time draws to a close, Creation remains in crisis. God is still with us, on God's own terms.

If this year hasn't yet convinced all of us to set aside - or at least re-assess- the old books and sayings we have relied on to support our use of Scripture, and ask afresh "what **is** the Spirit saying to the churches" [ cf Revelation 2:29, 3:22 ff] I dread to think what it will take.

Fires of unprecedeted scope and ferocity, a speeding up of the rise of the sea-levels and the melting of glaciers, and then, of course, the Coronavirus wake-up call, not just reminding but reproofing us that the out way of life in living memory is at best unsustainable, at worst, destructive not just to our way of life, but that of so many other species too.

Christianity offers diverse 'models of God', but specifically through the gift of Christ, sharing in the bodily life of the Earth, we trust that God touches our own hearts and shares in our own trials.

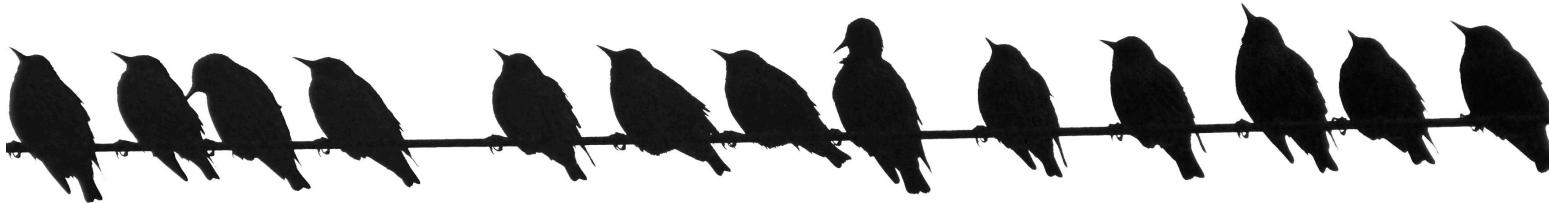
We have a chance, still, to discover the benefits of a humility [Philippians 2] as individuals and indeed as a species, which corrects, once and for all, the abusive interpretation of our purpose on earth as 'domination' [ Genesis 1:26-28 ]rather than compassionate management in partnership with the planet and life as 'senior partner' in the covenant.

A humility which is not disengagement, but a sincere seeking after our place and purpose as God's people; catalytic participants in the community of the World.

Humility, which accepts responsibility to do, pray, and be, what we can, rather than tilt at the windmills of control and solution, rather than transformation. [Ezekiel 18].

The wilder stretches of Christian scripture, like the Book of Ezekiel, have always been handled with care, a minefield for fools who rush in and try to pin down what each verse might 'mean'. Nonetheless, the spiritual literature of crisis in the Bible supports **us** as we face up to crisis. We find solidarity even in the creative desperation of some Psalms and prophets. Our faith has seldom been so vital to our own survival, and it really doesn't matter if we've got it wrong until now [cf the story Jesus tells of the son who changed his mind].

After this year, will Jesus say to us: "even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe"? [Matthew 21:32].



# **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) Touch the Earth lightly, by Shirley Erena Murray, (1931-2020)**

*An outstanding hymn, which allows for a change of tune part-way through, though the meter allows for it to fit with several well-known tunes.*

*Source e.g. CH4 243*

## **2) Settings of Psalm 8**

*Although the ‘d-word’ - dominion appears in many versions, this is a chance, if the psalm is sensitively introduced, to set the human place humbly in context, whilst allowing for wonder and awe at the responsibility we have.*

*Source e.g: CH4 4 or 5*

**3) All creatures of our God and King (based on St Francis, translated by William Henry Draper)**

*With the authority of the centuries, this rather long hymn (you might need to select verses) presents a very wholesome all-encompassing spirituality, which does not shirk the vital consciousness of mortality, without which we are so easily seduced into “infinite growth” and “single-use” ways of life. Source e.g. CH4 147*

**4) Sing for God’s glory, by Kathy Galloway (b. 1952)**

*This hymn, when pondered on - and a leader of worship might need to point this out - presents the unity of wonder at and care for creation, with justice in human affairs. One cannot exist without the other.*

Source e.g. CH4 172

**5) For the beauty of the Earth, by Folliot Sandford Pierpoint (1835-1917)**

*‘Flowers of earth and buds of heaven’. Beauty has value. Beauty is a theological category. We are part of it. May our actions, initiatives, and environmental commitment be a ‘sacrifice of praise’.*

Source e.g. CH4 181

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*New writing :Hymn-poem.*

**Our legacy...**

There is a need to counteract the doom and gloom of the attitude that humanity is a “virus that infests the Earth”. No, we should claim our place and purpose of managing and enhancing life on earth, as well as being aware of the human injustice that has led to the crises of the environment in God’s Creation. The hymn poem below also picks up on the whinging problem encountered by Ezekiel in this week’s reading.

Tune: DCM - e.g. Kingsfold : CH4 291  
**(or any other DCM tune which has a change of mood mid-verse)**

1) Our legacy is dire, our people  
trample down the Earth  
through fire and smoke and slavery  
abundance turns to dearth.

Yet Christ, opposing, crucified  
and risen, to transform

with hope enlists each one of us  
to turn from endless harm.

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2) We moan, and claim despair our lot  
as if that comfort brought  
And crises wait in line to bring  
our vaunted wealth to naught

Yet each new day brings hope and opens  
doors we never saw  
The risen Christ defies denial  
and only love is law.

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3) We are not creatures yet to come  
We're called to choose right now  
dependent on the bees, the trees,  
the soil we tend, the plough,

We won't infest, no: we'll invest  
our love, our wisdom deep  
in hope beyond horizons bleak:  
Sustaining-Christ's bequest!