



CREATION TIME 2015 - WEEK 1 SEPTEMBER 6TH

INTRODUCTION

Worship material for Creation Time 2015 comes from an ecumenical writing group, with contributors from the Church of Scotland, The Methodist Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church.

It follows the World Council of Churches theme, *Joining the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>

It is written to help prepare and equip congregations, churches and parishes to respond appropriately to the COP21 gathering, due to take place in Paris in early December 2015. (<http://www.cop21paris.org>) Leaders and representatives of more than one hundred and ninety countries will be meeting together to try to agree measures necessary to avoid damaging changes to the planet and its inhabitants, including a possibly catastrophic 2°C rise in the global temperatures.

THE MATERIAL

The material follows the Revised Common Lectionary readings for September, with a particular emphasis on the Gospel readings, which feature Jesus journeying on the road:

- Week One Journey to Meet with Others (Mark 7: 24-37)
- Week Two Journey to the Big City (Mark 8: 27-38)
- Week Three Journey to Understanding (Mark 9: 30-37)
- Week Four Journey in the Company of Others (Mark 9: 38-50)

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Creation Time Resources 2015: Joining the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace



THE WRITING GROUP

Members of the Creation Time 2015 Writing Group:

Jenny Adams is a Church of Scotland minister in Duffus, Spynie & Hopeman Church, in Moray. She was a member of the Church of Scotland's Church & Society Council, and has been involved in Christian Aid and Eco-Congregation in various ways for a number of years.

Trevor Jamison, a United Reformed Church Minister, is the Environmental Chaplain for Eco Congregation Scotland (<http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org>)

Belinda and Andrew Letby are Methodist Ministers. Previously, Belinda worked in the Credit Union movement and retains an active interest in ethical finance. Andrew, formerly an Industrial Chaplain working in the public transport sector, retains an interest in sustainable transport solutions. Environmental concerns played a major role when redeveloping the premises of the busy Edinburgh church community they currently serve.

Richard Murray is a Lay Reader in the Scottish Episcopal Church and a member of its Church in Society Committee, where he has a focus on environmental issues. He is a board member of Eco-Congregation Scotland.

ABOUT CREATION TIME

Creation Time started in the Orthodox Church in 1989 and has been supported by a growing number of churches across Europe since then. The European Christian Environmental Network has urged churches to adopt a Time for Creation, stretching from 1 September to the feast of St Francis on 4 October. This was endorsed at the European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania in 2007, when it was agreed that Creation Time "be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change".

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PILGRIMAGE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE –
JOURNEY TO MEET WITH OTHERS

In December 2105, representatives of one hundred and ninety six countries meet in Paris to try to agree measures necessary to avoid damaging changes to the planet and its inhabitants, including a possibly catastrophic 2°C rise in the global temperatures. They come from different nations and cultures, bringing a range of cultural, political and other differences with them. Such challenging differences were not unknown in biblical times.

THOUGHTS ON THE READINGS

ISAIAH 35:4-7A

The sense of fear before God appears many times in the Bible and some people have a problem with it. Does it mean we are frightened or intimidated by God? Or does it mean we hold God in awe and wonder? God is keen to reassure those who feel this way, “Be strong, do not fear!” And in order to instill trust, the vivid imagery that follows suggests that any witnesses to these mighty actions will be more awestruck and dumbfounded than ready to run away. A great transformation is about to occur, particularly to the weakest and most vulnerable in society and their hearts will be racing with hope. The word ‘vengeance’ needs to be considered within the spectrum of justice and perhaps a more accurate depiction of the forthcoming

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Godly action would be 'restorative justice'. There is a breathless expectation about what God is about to do. The voices of the voiceless have been heard. There is hope that God will answer fervent prayers. This passage begins with promises of a transformation of the natural order; the deserts will blossom abundantly because water will stream there and the people will see the glory and majesty of the Lord.

PSALM 146

This is the first of the great praise psalms which conclude the Book of Psalms. The central question is whom should we trust? The Lord of creation is restoring order and executing justice for the oppressed, feeding the hungry, freeing the prisoners and relieving the oppressed, giving sight to the blind and protection to the orphan and the widow. But what of the human rulers, the 'powers that be'? It is tempting to trust them because their help is immediate but ultimately they are powerless to save because their rule is temporary so should not be trusted in place of the lasting salvation of the sovereign Lord.

JAMES 2:1-10, (11-13), 14-17

Jesus' straightforward command that 'love your neighbour as yourself' and 'love for God' provide the summary of the Torah (Mt 22.37-39; Mk 12.30-31 and Lk 10.25-28) is given added ethical flesh by James' uncompromising critique of examples where favouritism dishonours the poor, the rich being given a place of honour while the poor are marginalised. Whilst the assemblies might proclaim their inclusiveness, the truth was that socioeconomic discrimination was practised. In first century Palestine, wealth was a means of supporting and maintaining positions of honour, a central social value in Mediterranean society.

Members of the elite could expect a life of luxury, the best of everything, but in the eyes of James they would be denied the blessings promised to those who chose kingdom values. In echoing the beatitudes, James reminds his readers that the poor hold a position of honour because they are honoured by God, so those who discriminate against the poor are guilty of sin and will suffer divine judgement.

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James concludes his argument by saying that a faith that is not active in good works is not faith. Credal utterances about belief are of no value if failure to observe the law of love lays bare an empty faith.

MARK 7:24-37

Jesus finds himself caught up in a verbal sparring match when he encounters the Syrophoenician woman who comes from the city of Tyre (see also Matthew 15: 25 – 27). There is a tension between Jesus and the petitioner suggesting a grievance in the background. To Mark's listeners, as has been suggested by Gerd Theissen, 'The Gospels in Context', this would have resonated with the socio-economic tension between the Jewish farmers of the hinterland and the citizens of Tyre. The narrow fertile hinterland next to Tyre was the 'breadbasket' of the region and the city exercised its financial muscle to commandeer grain, exploiting the Jews who were the local farmers.

Jesus may therefore be expressing a voice for the voiceless, his people, hence his extraordinary statement, 'First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' 'The dogs' appears to be a derogatory reference to the people of Tyre. But he has the table turned on him by the woman, who is defence counsel for the 'dogs' and Jesus is impelled to respond in the name of love.

When the disciples brought the deaf man with the speech impediment to Jesus, he "put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue". Then Jesus spoke to the man saying in Aramaic, "Ephphatha!" which means 'be opened'. Jesus is opening all the senses of the man. He can now hear and 'speak plainly' so that all can understand him. Jesus is being revealed as the sign of God's love breaking into the world, breaking down barriers and conventions.



SERMON THOUGHTS

To belong to the people of God requires us to be a channel for God's inclusive love. It's about being civil to one another, treating one another with respectful reserve, listening to what others have to say. It's about overturning the status quo of social order, gender, ethnic, cultural and religious divisions and moving towards God's promise to bless all humankind. It's not about food for some and not for others. It's about food for all. We are invited here to place ourselves in the shoes of 'the other' however that term 'the other' may be defined.

I am also an integral part of nature. I respect other organisms, not only because of their intrinsic value but because of the countless relationships and balances that exist between them that have a value greater than their use to me. The destiny of humans, as of all intelligent creatures, is to 'be opened', liberated in other words, to share in the divine nature. We are becoming aware of life's interrelatedness. What we do to nature, we do not do in part. We do it to the whole. We are joined together in a common purpose.

The Christian faith offers a distinctive perspective on political issues and the Church has every right to articulate such reflection on matters concerning care for creation, economic justice and world peace. But the secular world does not want to hear us. They would prefer that we retreat into our private devotions. However, the earth is in distress and is calling to us to respond, as individuals and communities with ideas and action, particularly at this time with reference to the COP21 meeting due to take place in Paris at the end of this year.

We have heard the story of Jesus and through our imagination and reason, informed by biblical wisdom, we can learn to reverence one another and reverence the rest of creation. Jesus lifts the veil of dominance from our eyes, gives us ears to listen and unstops our mouths. We are called from a place of sacred wholeness and reverence to take up again our ancient and sacred duty of care for the physical world.

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MUSICAL SUGGESTIONS

HYMN BOOKS USED

Church Hymnary 4 (CH4) Common Praise (CP)

Hymns Ancient & Modern: New Standard Edition (AMNS)

New Century Hymnal (NCH) Rejoice and Sing (RS) Singing the Faith (StF)

PILGRIMAGE

Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS, StF
I Want Jesus to Walk With Me	CH4
I Want to Walk With Jesus Christ	MP
Look Forward in Faith	CH4
O God of Bethel by Whose Hand	AMNS, CH4, MP, RS, StF
One More Step Along the World I go	CH4, RS, StF
We Are Marching in the Light of God	CH4, RS, MP, StF
We Will Walk With God, My Brothers	CH4, StF
Who Would True Valour See / he Who Would Valiant Be	Ch4, RS, MP, StF
Will You Come and Follow Me	CH4, RS, StF

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THIS WEEK'S HYMNS

All people that on earth do dwell	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS, StF
Christ whose glory fills the skies	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS, StF
Dear Lord and Father of mankind	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS, StF
I heard the voice of Jesus say	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS, StF
Lord, thy word abideth	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS
O for a thousand tongues to sing	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS, StF

PRAYERS

OPENING PRAYER

God of love, guide us through the wilderness of our lives.
Be present through all the temptations, trials, and troubles of this life,
and nourish us with streams of living water flowing from your Word.
Open up our imagination and determination
To make us instruments of your justice
and loving companions to the persecuted and the oppressed,
So that in our actions we may restore a just order to all your creation. **Amen**

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God
You hear the cry of the fearful heart,
and forgive those who are truly repentant.
Help us to give voice to the voiceless
and uphold those who work for justice,
That we may joyfully bring in the glory of your kingly rule.
Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

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KYRIE

We confess our selfishness and failure to love others.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

We confess that we have not been active in our faith.

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

We confess that we have become distracted by worldly affairs and stumbled into sin.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Creator God,

We are called to love and serve you

Through honouring the sanctity of your creation
and loving our brothers and sisters.

Now we offer you our praise and thanksgiving
and in these petitions

Our prayers on behalf of the church and the world.

Loving God we look to you, **receive our prayer**

Give us the grace to show true faith

In works of love and mercy.

Give courage and strength to all who work in agencies bringing relief to the hungry
and the homeless,

Peacekeeping forces endeavouring to maintain law and order,
and organisations striving to relieve injustice.

Give wisdom and compassion to the world leaders

In the governance of the care of your creation.

Loving God we look to you, **receive our prayer**

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We pray for all persecuted communities
and all who are suffering violence.

We pray for all who are being exploited by the wealthy and powerful,
and for governments of nations lacking moral and spiritual guidance,
to resist their persuasive but empty promises.

We pray for the work of the United Nations,
For your guidance in the decisions leaders make at COP21 in Paris,
to restore our noble calling in the care of creation.

Loving God we look to you, **receive our prayer**

We pray for our families and friends,
That they may have ears open to your Word
and become instruments of your peace.
Help us to hear the needs of our communities
and be ready to respond with active love.

Loving God we look to you, **receive our prayer**

We pray for the sick, especially those impaired in sight, hearing or speech.
May your living Word bring comfort and healing to those in need.
May we be ready to respond to those who are feeling lonely or neglected,
fellow pilgrims sharing the path of life, that together we proceed,
our mouths filled with laughter and our tongues with singing.

Loving God we look to you, **receive our prayer**

We pray for those who have reached the journey's end
and are now made perfect in your love.

Loving God,
Draw us closer to you
and may the whole world be at one with you,
As you are one in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

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