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## CREATION TIME 2015 - WEEK 3 SEPTEMBER 20TH

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### INTRODUCTION

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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

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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



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### THE WRITING GROUP

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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.

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### ABOUT CREATION TIME

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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 UNDERSTANDING

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Conference participants in Paris are challenged to come to a shared understanding concerning climate change and how nations should respond. Reaching understanding is a process, sometimes stimulated by individuals who challenge current practice or offer new insight. Can church communities model processes which lead to shared understanding?

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THOUGHTS ON THE READINGS

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JEREMIAH 11:18-20

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Here we find one of the laments or confessions of Jeremiah, a very personal prayer dialogue between the prophet and God. The general sense of doom that pervades most of the book of Jeremiah is personalised here, as the prophet becomes aware of dire threats against his life, apparently by the people of his home town of Anathoth.

The context of chapter 11 gives some sense of why Jeremiah might be so unpopular. His message is not a comfortable one for the people of Judah or Jerusalem – they are being warned that having turned away from God, having not listened to God or obeyed, God will bring disaster upon them. Here the warning is directed quite widely to all the people – at other times, Jeremiah's criticism is directed more specifically at leaders and prophets – and at no time does it win friends, or appear to influence people. However, despite the unpopularity of this message and vocation, Jeremiah has to speak what he believes is true – an imperative eloquently described as like fire in his bones (20:7-9).



In today's verses we find a psalm of lament or complaint used to express the alienation and isolation of the prophet. He calls on God – crediting God with revealing the threat to his life. He proclaims his innocence - “like a gentle lamb to the slaughter” not knowing the danger he was in. He reports some of his enemies’ speech - the tree and fruit imagery of their threat echoes the prophet’s picture of Judah in good times and bad (11:16). He puts his trust in God, and calls for vengeance – which he would perceive as justice.

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#### PSALM 54

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This is an individual lament psalm, following similar patterns to Jeremiah’s personal dialogue with God. God is addressed directly, re-establishing a personal relationship between the petitioner and God, and with an expectation that God will and must act.

God is treated as the judge, and the evidence is built up by the petitioner. The plight of the writer is described, emphasising his innocence, and his faithfulness to and dependence on God. That is contrasted with his enemies, who “do not set God before them” and are either “insolent” or “strangers/outsideers”, depending on the manuscript version read at v3.

All of this is presented to God, who is reminded of the power of God and God’s name to save the oppressed. There is an expectation that God’s honour and justice can only be upheld by upholding the writer’s life, in the face of those who rebel against God. If God is truly faithful to God’s nature, then the writer can trust in God to act, bringing justice – which the writer assumes is an end to his enemies. The writer closes by promising offering, sacrifice and thanksgiving to God when the expected deliverance comes.

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#### JAMES 3:13 – 4:3, 7-8<sup>A</sup>

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This is a passage contrasting different approaches to wisdom, and their consequences. The first section (3:13-18) compares earthly wisdom with wisdom from above, with clear differences in the fruit they bear. 3:18 links that contrast with the next section, which discusses further the roots of conflict in our desires.

Key to the wisdom that leads to a good life is humility, and an openness to God. This is not driven by ambition or selfishness. Instead we find much gentler adjectives –



pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, true. This will be seen in a “good life”, right living and peace.

The consequences of envy and ambition are expanded on more particularly in 4:1-3. These result in inner conflict, manifested in cravings so strong people are willing to kill for them. Therefore the inner conflict generates conflict in the community too. In such a frame of mind, even if someone asks or turns to God for help, the desires expressed are unlikely to be fulfilled.

As with many passages of strongly contrasted good and bad attitude or behaviour, this can be heard as quite condemnatory – and which of us could claim to only live from the right kind of wisdom? However, God is gracious and the gentleness and mercy of God’s wisdom is available to all – if we turn to God, willing to listen and obey. This is summed up beautifully in 4:8a “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

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#### MARK 9:30-37

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The disciples were always learning – it’s what disciples are meant to do. Here we find them learning as they journey – in different ways, and not entirely successfully.

In w30-32, we find Jesus deliberately setting aside private time to teach them, trying to explain again about his death. His first attempt in 8:31ff had outraged Peter, and resulted in Jesus rebuking Peter as the deceiver. Perhaps as a consequence of that, when the disciples still don’t understand this time, none of them are willing to ask for clarification. They aren’t willing to enter into dialogue with Jesus, out of fear of being wrong.

In w33-37, the disciples have been trying to learn from each other – discussing things as they walk – though the topic reaffirms just how much they have to learn. Their embarrassed silence when asked about it does suggest they know enough to realise greatness was not on Jesus’ agenda – and again, their fear of inadequacy keeps them from engaging with Jesus.

This time Jesus tries a different learning approach – an example – that of a small child, someone of no economic value, with no power or influence, disregarded and vulnerable. While Mark has portrayed Jesus as someone with great power (conquering the power of demons), here Jesus is taking the least powerful in his arms and offering them as a model to learn from. It is humility and service that is Jesus’ way, and the way to God, not greatness. This is a theme that Mark returns to in 10:13ff and 10:35ff.



### SERMON THOUGHTS

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There are lots of potentially overlapping ideas across the different texts. All the texts pose questions about the motivations and desires that lead us to action or inaction. They also all point to the importance of drawing near to God, trusting in God's way and God's justice. Here are two more specific suggestions:

#### 1. Honesty before God

In the raw laments of Jeremiah and Psalm 54, there is an honesty before God we might find uncomfortable. We don't often voice what we'd really like to see happen to those we don't like – whether that is people who have hurt us, people committing terrible abuses, or those whose choices are contributing to climate injustice. However, Jeremiah and the Psalmist are both willing to tell God what they think is what.

It is open to question whether they are being completely honest about their own standing – but they are certainly more openly engaging with God (“drawing near to God”, James 4:8) than the disciples seem to be in Mark 9. Here we find the disciples confused, but unwilling to ask questions; then we find the disciples voluble amongst themselves, but unwilling to tell Jesus what about. In both cases, they close themselves off from learning all they could from Jesus, so prolonging their misunderstanding of God's way of service.

With climate change, there is a great need for honest accounting. Perhaps we need to be more open before God about what we think about those we see as obstacles to progress – whether individuals, nations or corporations. Drawing near to God with such thoughts may bring wisdom. But more importantly, we need to be more honest with ourselves, and before God, about our role in climate change. How is our own lifestyle helping or damaging creation? Are we really listening to the disregarded? Are we willing to examine our motivations and our desires (James 4), and to change?

#### 2. Listening to difficult messages

In Mark's gospel, we find Jesus trying repeatedly to get his disciples to hear and understand what it means for him to be the Messiah. Peter is unwilling to accept what Jesus is saying the first time (8:29ff). The second time, the disciples didn't understand, and were afraid to ask about it (9:30-32). The occasions in chapters 9 and 10 (10:32-34) are both followed by disciples discussing greatness and status –

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they either can't understand or won't understand. The idea of the betrayal, defeat, and death of their friend and Messiah seems to be beyond them.

In Jeremiah, we find Jeremiah lamenting the threat he faces because of the unpopularity of his message. He has been trying to get the people and their leaders to hear and understand what God is saying, that they might turn again to God. The people are unwilling to accept that message – particularly when there are priests and prophets offering something more hopeful and palatable (e.g. Jer. 8:8-11, 23:9-40).

In discussions of climate change – where the challenge is enormous, the consequences already dreadful, the changes needed are life-changing – it is understandable that many choose not to hear the message. Easier alternatives are offered – in the name of science, balance, or economics. Actions are dismissed as too little, in the face of wider inaction. Or we just don't really look or listen properly – because often those who most need us to change are the least powerful and influential. But Jeremiah models the imperative to speak the truth, no matter how uncomfortable, and for that truth to be heard and acted upon.

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### MUSICAL SUGGESTIONS

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#### HYMN BOOKS USED

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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)

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#### PILGRIMAGE

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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

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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

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All creatures of our God and King	AMNS, CH4, CP, MP, RS
Beauty for brokenness	CH4, MP, StF
For the fruits of all creation	CH4, MP, RS, StF
God made me as I am	CH4
Great God, your love has called us here	CH4, CP, RS, StF
Holy wisdom, lamp of learning	CH4
I love the Lord (Psalm 116)	CH4
I shall praise you, O God (Psalm 138)	CH4
Inspired by love and anger	CH4
It's me, it's me, O Lord	CH4, StF
Listen to the word which God has spoken	CH4
Lord, teach me all your ways (Psalm 25)	CH4
Spirit of God, in all that's true I know you	CH4
Take up the song, and sing the praise	CH4
The earth belongs to God alone (Psalm 24)	CH4

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Up from the depths I cry to God (Psalm 130) CH4

We do not hope to ease our minds CH4, StF

We lay our broken world CH4, CP, StF

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#### PRAYERS

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#### CALL TO WORSHIP

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God of loving wisdom, we open our hearts to you.

**As we draw near to worship, draw near to us.**

God of loving justice, we open our minds to you.

**As we draw near to learn, draw near to us.**

God of loving fire, we open our lives to you.

**As we draw near to be made new, draw near to us.**

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#### PRAYER OF APPROACH

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Loving Creator,

You are the spark of life behind the universe,

From the infinite to the invisible;

You are the source of goodness in all things,

From the magnificent to the microscopic.

We come to open our eyes to your gifts,

And in awe, we worship you.

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Loving Son,  
You are the friend of all people,  
From the smallest child to the most senior citizen;  
You are the teacher we all need  
For the first and the last of us.  
We come to open our minds to your words,  
And in humility, we listen.

Loving Spirit,  
You are the fire burning within us,  
From passion and compassion;  
You are the wisdom that brings new life,  
For creatures great and small.  
We come to open our hearts to your transforming power,  
And in anticipation, we wait.

Loving God,  
Creator, Son, Spirit,  
You are life, wisdom and compassion,  
Bound together in love.  
As we come before you,  
Open our lives,  
And bind us together in loving community,  
Worshipping and following you.

**Amen**

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### COLLECT

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God of love,

You invite us to draw near to you,

To listen to your words, that we might learn from your ways,

Hear the voices of the vulnerable,

and welcome all in your name.

As we come together before you,

Open our hearts to honestly share our hopes, our fears and our confusion with you,

That we might be changed and made new through your love.

**Amen**

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### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

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Loving God,

Creator, Son, Spirit,

You are life, wisdom and compassion,

Bound together in love.

Before your life-giving power,

We remember the times we have caused pain or hurt,

Or have made choices that affect the earth's ability to sustain life.

Before your wisdom,

We admit the times when we have not understood things,

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And have not been willing to seek or hear guidance from you or from others.

Before your compassion,

We confess the times we have not looked on others with care,

Or have not been willing to listen to stories of lives beyond our own.

Before your love,

We open our lives in honesty and humility,

Knowing there are so many actions done and left undone that cause you pain.

And before your love,

We listen to your promise of forgiveness and healing,

Allowing our hearts to be changed and our lives to be made new,

Through the loving touch of Jesus Christ, our friend and teacher,

**Amen**

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#### PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

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God of justice,

Throughout history you have called us to listen to your messengers

Proclaiming hope and challenging our destructive desires.

As the message of climate science continues loud and clear,

May its urgency be heard by politicians and leaders,

And by every one of us who must make changes.

As the voices of the most vulnerable are heard,

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Through global movements and partnerships,

May we recognise them as our neighbours and truly hear them.

As the self-interested resist the changes called for by those crying out,

May we stand together with others to protect their lives and their rights.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Lord of love,

You have shown us how to love and welcome all people,

Especially remembering the least, the poorest and the marginalised.

Where people are have few choices or chances because of poverty,

May we work to transform the systems that limit their lives.

Where anyone is turned away from safety and refuge,

Or driven from their home by occupation, violence, stigma or desperation,

May we offer welcome in your name.

Where livelihoods are lost because of the choices of developed nations,

May we play our part in finding practical solutions, and offering a real future.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

Spirit of truth,

You move in us and among us all,

As a fire in our bones, as the breath that sustains us.

For those who need to be challenged to listen, hear and change,

May you fill our hearts and minds.

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For churches, communities and nations who need to act,  
May you inspire our actions, leading us in your way of peace.

For those who need comforted, as they live with loss, fear or pain,  
May you be in us and around us.

With these, and all the prayers of our hearts,

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

**Amen**

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#### ALL-AGE TALK THOUGHTS

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##### WHO IS THE GREATEST? WHO IS FIRST OR LAST?

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**Top trumps** – the children’s card game – allows lots of comparisons between people/animals/cars, based on scores given in different categories.

Make up Top Trumps cards for different disciples. Possible categories are :- fishing skills; business skills; intelligence; loyalty; value to God. Depending on the disciple, some may be better at fishing or business. All struggled a bit with intelligence, going by today’s story (and the benefit of hindsight!). No-one’s loyalty was too high, going by Maundy Thursday. But all get 10/10 for value to God.

So who is the greatest disciple? No clear winner. All made mistakes. All got things wrong. All had lots to learn. But all loved by God, valued by God, called by God to help share Jesus’ message of God’s love.

And us – what might we score (honestly)? We all make mistakes, all get things wrong. Creation time – thinking about our care for God’s creation – all of us have responsibility for mistakes that are causing terrible damage. All have lots to learn – about the climate, about the earth, about how to change our lives to help.

And all loved by God, called by God to help share Jesus’ message of God’s love – for all people and all of creation.

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