



CREATION TIME 2015 - WEEK 4 – SEPTEMBER 27TH

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)

Eco-Congregation Scotland

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 IN THE COMPANY OF OTHERS

Previous international meetings on climate change have been characterised by dispute and disagreement, particularly over the responsibility of the economically stronger nations for the current situation with regard to the climate and implementing solutions that are offered. Strong, collective leadership is greatly needed, taking care to listen for insights and ideas from unexpected quarters.

THOUGHTS ON THE READINGS

NUMBERS 11: 4-6, 10-16, 24-29

Journey in the company of others is not always a tranquil experience, as this incident demonstrates. In fact, complaint and rebellion are a recurring feature in the Book of Numbers, which offers an account of journey in the wilderness (1: 1), commencing in Sinai and eventually concluding in the land of Canaan.

On this occasion complaint concerns the food provided for the journey, displaying both lack of gratitude for what God provides ('nothing at all but this manna') and nostalgia for the 'good old days' in Egypt, when, allegedly, fish, fruit and vegetables were both free and plentiful. In reality, whatever the level of provision, the food in Egypt was anything but free, being but the rations allocated to slave labour.

An unrealistic demand for meat (11: 4), going beyond even what was on offer in the previous 'golden age' in Egypt, places yet greater pressure on the expedition's leader, Moses, who does not feel up to task of 'mothering' an entire people (11:12). The solution is to share the leadership responsibility more widely, perhaps even involving some of the grumblers in this role.



To prosper on the journey and to reach the goal, appropriate structures need to be put in place (11: 24-25). As the incident with Eldad and Medad demonstrates (11: 26-29), however, the company also needs to be open to positive, God-inspired contributions that come from outside the recognised leadership group.

PSALM 19: 7-14

In a psalm that extols the work and will of God the first six verses pointed to God's activity in creation, both in terms of the origins of the world and in sustaining it. Now, in these verses, the focus turns to knowing and responding to God through an encounter with 'the law of the Lord' (19: 7). Here, 'law' is not some closed and final code but a written revelation of God's will to be pondered; something both illuminating and challenging.

A series of terms – decrees, precepts, commandment, and ordinances – are offered as synonyms, building up a richer picture of what constitutes 'law'. To the one who ponders it the 'law' brings life, wisdom and gladness (11: 7, 8). It is also 'fear' (the beginning of wisdom? – Psalm 111: 10) and yet both precious as gold and as enjoyable as sweet honey (19: 10)

Although offering timely warning and the possibility of reward, by itself, pondering the law does not guarantee avoidance of error, a danger compounded by the opposition of others. Thus, the psalmist still needs God's help to avoid wrong actions, speech or thought (11: 13^b, 14).

As with the help offered by a structured leadership group, in the reading from Numbers, the 'law' in Psalm 19 provides a structure or setting in which one comes to a deeper appreciation of God and God's will. Like Moses and the Elders, however, it is not the sole source of help.

JAMES 5: 13-20

In this passage we enter the closing section of a letter written to a church, a congregation, making the journey of faith. As with the reading from the Book of Numbers, 'elders', though their role may not be otherwise closely defined, have an important role to play in keeping the company on the right way, through attitudes and practices of care.



The journey has highs and lows; joys that call for singing, but sufferings and sickness that call for prayer. Whilst complaining, which featured in the Sinai wilderness seems to be absent here, as with Moses and the seventy wilderness elders, care for the greater company is a ministry carried out by a group (5: 14).

Care for others on the journey, however, is not just the responsibility of those with designated office but demands wider responsibility amongst the 'travellers'. Those who are ill are to call for the carers to visit them (5: 15), not rely on them having supernatural knowledge of who is unwell! The group is characterised by a mutual support and accountability whereby those who have sinned 'confess their sins to one another' (5: 16).

The final exhortation is reserved for the situation where some stray from the path the company is following. For the writer, 'the truth' from which one wanders relates to actions, not just intellectual or emotional aspects of faith e.g. 3: 13-18.

MARK 9: 38-50

Like Israelites in the wilderness, Jesus' travelling band of disciples is prone to murmurings of dispute and complaint. A few verses earlier the dispute had been over status within the group – who is the greatest? Now the implied complaint is about others who cast out demons in Jesus' name but who are 'not following us' (9: 38).

Like Moses with Joshua, Jesus' response to John is surprisingly inclusive, the justification for his response being two-fold. Firstly, involvement in good actions done in his name affect the doer in a positive way, whether or not they are recognised members of the Jesus-group (9: 39). Secondly, and in words that may have been proverbial then as they are today, 'Whoever is not against us is for us' (9: 40).

These assertions, though, refer to those who take action – doing deeds of power or providing a cup of water for the thirsty – and do not affirm inaction which masquerades as neutrality. In fact, the challenging nature of the call to care for the vulnerable (9: 42) is emphasised by the radical imagery employed; better to lose body parts than take a road to hell.

Meditation on the 'law of the Lord' has a purifying effect (Psalm 19: 9) and so too does focusing on undertaking Jesus-inspired good actions (9: 49), including cultivating good relationships within the group of his identified followers, called to be 'at peace with one another' (9: 50).



SERMON THOUGHTS

There's a gap between what people know and say they should do and what they actually do. Churches are no exception to this rule, yet don't be nostalgic for a 'golden age' from which high standard we have fallen. Israelite wilderness travellers complained about the food (and the God who provided it). Psalmists were aware that pondering the 'the law of the Lord' did not of itself prevent you sinning. Jesus' companions on his journey squabbled among themselves, seeking to exclude those whose face did not fit. As for the Church, well, as James's congregation demonstrated, sins still existed to be confessed, and some wandered from the straight and narrow.

We're no worse (and no better) than those who have gone but that does not excuse from trying to achieve more consistency between thoughts, words and actions. We do this for our own sake and hoping that we can share good news with the wider world, including those trying to make journey to better future for this planet. Thankfully, even amidst the stories of shortcomings, scripture provides resources for the journey ahead. These apply not only to churches but to wider communities, countries, and even climate change conference participants. Of course, the better we practise what we preach the more others are liable to listen and respond.

Scripture, our shared source of stories about who we are, the values we hold and the actions we take, begins with creation and ends with re-creation; the stage upon which we act out our lives. Pondering this 'law of the Lord' for today, we find that leadership is vital for any journey; leadership shared being better for all, especially when leaders are open to insights from unexpected sources. The journey goes better when all members of the company participate, the stronger supporting the weaker.

A wider vision, shared leadership accessible to others, committed mutual relationships; to possess and practise these would bode well for an international conference. The more our churches exhibit them the better the chance our message will be heard.

MUSICAL SUGGESTIONS

HYMN BOOKS USED

Church Hymnary 4 (CH4) Common Praise (CP)

Hymns Ancient & Modern: New Standard Edition (AMNS)

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New Century Hymnal (NCH)

Rejoice and Sing (RS)

Singing the Faith (StF)

PILGRIMAGE

Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah	CH4, 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	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

THIS WEEK'S HYMNS

Deep in the Shadows of the Past	StF
God's perfect Love Revives the Soul	RS
The Stars Declare His Glory	CH4, CP
Lord, Speak to me That I May Speak	CH4, MP, RS, StF
O Christ, the Healer, we Have Come	CH4, StF
Prayer is the Souls' Sincere Desire	CH4, MP, StF
What a Friend We have in Jesus	CH4, CP, MP, RS, StF
We Cannot Measure How You Heal	CH4, RS, StF

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Touch the Earth Lightly, Use the World Gently CH4, StF

You are Salt for the Earth, O People NCH

PRAYERS

PRAYER OF APPROACH

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. (Psalm 19: 1)

When we are at home, be present to us, **revive us.**

When we are on a journey, accompany us, **revive us.**

As we gather now to worship you, speak to us, **revive us.**

COLLECT

Lord Jesus Christ,

Who affirmed all who do good deeds in your name,

Even in the sharing of a cup of water,

Grant to us

The wisdom to see the way forward for your people and this planet,

The courage to choose the right path,

And the will to share this way with others.

Amen.

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

We praise you, O God.

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In your creation you provide food and drink, the means for life's journey.

We praise you, O God.

In your Son, Jesus, you share with us yourself. You call us to share with others on the journey.

We praise you, O God.

Through your Holy Spirit you guide us in the way ahead; that your Church might live and your world might flourish.

[WITH OPTION TO USE TWO VOICES FOR PRAYER IN THE LINES ABOVE]

Yet we too easily wander from your path of truth.

You provide, but we attribute it all to our own efforts.

You share yourself, but we are reluctant to share what we possess with others.

You offer guidance, but we think we know better about the way ahead.

You tell us to put our faith in you but we put ultimate faith in ourselves.

So, forgive us, we pray. Return us to your path of truth.

Silence

And as we experience the good news of your forgiveness, help us to be thankful for the good things of your world, to share them with others, to seek the best for all of your creation.

Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. (James 5: 13)

O God who sends us on life's journey and who journeys with us, hear us as we pray for your world and for its future direction.

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As people prepare to meet in Paris, we pray for all those who can give a true picture of your world, giving thanks for climate scientists and working farmers, for journalists, writers and campaigners. Make them true guides for your people.

God of our journey

Hear our prayer

We pray for all those on the journey to Paris as leaders, delegates and representatives, and for all advisers to the COP21 climate change conference. May this 'conference of parties' grow together on the way and this be journey conclude with agreement.

God of our journey

Hear our prayer

We pray for the church involvement in Paris. May your people be a positive presence on this journey, encouraging all to speak the truth, supporting those who feel unfairly treated, and reconciling those who are in disagreement.

God of our journey

Hear our prayer

We pray for all in this nation who are concerned about the future of this world, particularly for our representatives and leaders in politics and for churches and parishes which have registered as Eco-Congregations. May we become a country that cares for God's creation, now and forever.

God of our journey

Hear our prayer

And in the quietness hear us as we bring you our hopes and concerns, seeking your wisdom for the journey ahead.

Silence

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God of our journey

Hear our prayer

Amen

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