

Eco-Congregation Scotland

Creation Time Resources 2016: Followers of Jesus, Caring for Creation



INTRODUCTION

Worship material for Creation Time 2016 comes from an ecumenical writing group, with contributors from the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church.

It follows the theme, *Followers of Jesus, Caring for Creation*, emphasising the readings from the Gospel of Luke which appear in the Revised Common Lectionary in September.

Material from 2013, emphasising Year C RCL readings from Jeremiah is available at <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/materials/creation-time/>

THE MATERIAL

- Week One 04/09/16 Careful Planning Priorities (Luke 14: 25-33)
- Week Two 11/09/16 Keeping to the Right Path (Luke 15:1-10)
- Week Three 18/09/16 Caring Locally, Caring Globally (Luke 16:1-13)
- Week Four 25/09/16 Caring for all Creation (Luke 16:19-31)

THE WRITING GROUP

Members of the Creation Time 2015 Writing Group:

Jenny Adams is Church of Scotland minister of Duffus, Spynie & Hopeman Parish, in Moray, in the north-east of Scotland. As part of an Eco-congregation, and through many other connections, she is trying, failing, and keeping trying to live out creation care and concern for social justice in all of life.

Janet Foggie is minister of St Andrew's Parish Church in the Church of Scotland. She is a mediator with Place for Hope, Place an organisation accompanying and equipping people and faith communities so that all might reach their potential to be peacemakers who navigate conflict well, and finds much satisfaction in sharing hope for peace in our church and world.

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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".

ALSO AVAILABLE

Resources for World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation - September 1st 2016

In 2015 Pope Francis established September 1st as the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, encouraging the Catholic community around the world to pray for our common home. Now, for its second year, the aid agency, CAFOD, provides a prayer in union with creation at

<http://cafod.org.uk/content/download/25371/182321/version/5/file/A%20Christian%20prayer%20in%20union%20with%20creation-%20Laudato%20Si'.pdf>

And resources for organising a prayer vigil at

<http://cafod.org.uk/content/download/29948/340910/version/7/file/Prayer%20vigil%20for%20the%20care%20of%20creation.pdf>

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CREATION TIME 2016 - WEEK 1 – SEPTEMBER 4TH

CAREFUL PLANNING PRIORITIES

THOUGHTS ON THE READINGS

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

Within the collection of laws presented in Deuteronomy as a farewell address of Moses, chapters 29-30 summarise God's covenant as set before the people of Israel. It is offered to everyone – 29:10-11 includes leaders, elders, officials, men, children, women, and foreign workers, while v. 14 even includes “those who are not here with us today.” God wants them all to be God's people, and Moses describes different responses and their consequences for the land and people.

This text makes much of intergenerational connections, within a very big picture. People can live and learn based on the experience of the Exodus, even if they do not fully understand (29:2-4); everything is within the wider context of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (30:20). The responses and consequences apply in both the immediate and longer-term future, for “you and your descendants” (v19) wherever they are (v1).

Talk of “possessing” land may be uncomfortable, but v. 20 makes it clear that the land is a gift of God, in the context of observance of the covenant.

Ultimately, these verses offer choices, amongst life and death, blessing and curses, all of which are within God's care. These big choices – of life and prosperity, or death and adversity, in the context of landscape (v.15) - are a pretty good summary of choices facing twenty first century society in relation to climate change.



How do we choose? By hearing God's word, loving God, observing God's commands, walking God's ways (v16). But if we don't listen, close our ears, our minds, and our hearts, and choose to serve other gods or ways, then that does not lead to life and blessing (v17-18).

PSALM 1

Just as Deuteronomy 30 is a summary of God's covenant within a summary of God's law, so Psalm 1 can be read as a summary of the book of Psalms, possibly a prologue. It offers a similar set of choices regarding seeking and following God's way, or not, and their consequences.

The contrast concern to whom is a person is willing to listen. Will people follow the advice of those turned away from God, whether through conscious argument or destructive habits? Alternatively, will they seek to learn and then live by God's ways – law in the widest sense – in every moment of life? Seeking and living by God's ways will bring flourishing, as a person grows to be truly themselves, bearing the right fruit at the appropriate times. In contrast, those who have shut themselves off from God will end up empty and dry, like chaff and waste, with no sense of long-term future.

There is a thread of generosity and open-ness here. We can give ourselves willingly, not begrudgingly, to seeking God's ways and building relationships with God, others and the rest of creation – delighting in that path. The greater giving is God's - God blesses, God gives the law to learn from, God transplants us to situations where we can grow and flourish, God is with us and offers guidance.

PHILEMON 1: 1-21

In Paul's letter to Philemon, we find a personal matter addressed within the context of a church community. Philemon is invited to deal with Onesimus, a slave who has been serving Paul in prison, and who has apparently become a Christian in that time. Paul is returning Onesimus to Philemon, but with a request that he might be



welcomed back with new status as a Christian brother, and sent back to serve Paul in prison.

Again, we find choices offered. Philemon, presumably a wealthy Christian who hosts a church in his home, is asked to respond with welcome, forgiveness, and generosity. Paul recognises there may be a cost to be borne.

This text raises questions about motivations for taking action. Instead of commanding action, Paul is appealing to his status as apostle and prisoner for Christ. He appeals to his age, his love and relationship with Philemon, Onesimus' conversion to attain what he wants. Actions based on love; here, love of Paul, and love of Onesimus as a fellow Christian, are more life-giving and sustainable. Alternative readings suggest that Paul is being manipulative. Even if we accept them, though, we still see the importance of the personal, of relationships, and of our motivation to act.

LUKE 14: 25-33

This section of Luke is presented as teaching for the crowds who were travelling with Jesus. It is placed immediately after the parable of the feast, which illustrates God's welcome for everyone, especially the most vulnerable. While everyone is welcome, here Jesus spells out the cost of discipleship for all – though perhaps the cost will seem higher for those with most economic and social connections.

Jesus' teaching here offers the crowd the opportunity for informed consent – to know what they are getting into, should they choose to keep following. Conventional wisdom (e.g. Proverbs 24:3-6) sees the need to look ahead, to consider the resources needed to fulfil a plan, and to understand the consequences of commitments made. In the examples given, of domestic building projects or national conflicts, the potential consequences range from ridicule, through to financial ruin and military occupation.

In order to make the point, Jesus uses shocking language of hating father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even life itself (v26). That should make us sit up and take notice of what is at stake here. We have to consider our priorities, and understand that following Jesus will take precedence over family ties and obligations, over relationships and commitments, over security and comfort, over



possessions and finances, over popularity and crowds. Ultimately, we are reminded that our lives are not our own – they are a gift from God, and all of life comes under Jesus' way.

SERMON THOUGHTS

All of these texts lead to reflection about choices we have. Whose words and ways do we listen to, and how? What priority do we give to actively choosing God's ways in our lives? What outcomes might we expect? Do we choose life in all its fullness, for all God's children? Within that broader framework, two strands could be explored.

Consequences of our choices:

Psalm 1 spells out those consequences in terms of our selves, our personhood and fruitfulness, but using a metaphor of growth that is grounded in creation's flourishing.

Deuteronomy 30 broadens out the consequences to include future generations, the land that has been given, and wider struggle and adversity.

In Luke 14 we find the personal and political all implicated in our choices of way to follow. Here the blessings are less clear, but the potential costs of discipleship are spelled out.

If we look ahead with any wisdom, whether from these texts, lived experience, or listening to others, then we can inform our choices. With God's creation, there are many voices to listen to – firstly those living with the consequences of climate change and environmental destruction right now, but also scientists, economists, campaigners, theologians, and future generations. The costs of inaction are becoming clearer every day – because inaction is a path of “business as usual”, not a path of transformational love. The blessings from listening to God's call to care are tangled up in struggle and costs to our current way of life – but the invitation to follow, and find new fruitful life, is there too.

Motivation:

In Deuteronomy 30, living by the covenant may be motivated by dire warnings, as well as hope of blessings.

Psalm 1 offers flourishing and nurture when God is followed willingly, in every moment of life.



Paul tries to persuade Philemon based upon love for fellow Christians, and the strength of personal relationships.

To explore the motivation to follow Jesus, Luke 14 needs to be put in the wider context of Jesus' love – otherwise we just find the costs, rendering discipleship inexplicable. However, even in these verses there is evidence of the love that motivates Jesus to forewarn the crowds, and a reminder of the love that leads to taking up the cross.

Why do we seek God's ways? Why should those ways include caring for God's creation? Why should we therefore make the huge changes to our lifestyles that are necessary for climate change to be slowed down?

We find answers in the generosity of God, who gives us creation to be part of and relationships in which we flourish and learn. God also gives the written word, his living Word, alongside the bigger book of creation. God wants to bless all people and we are invited to respond to God's giving with our lives.

We find more answers when we recognise as sisters and brothers people from all across the world. We can listen to their stories, as they tell us now how their lives are affected by climate change and environmental destruction, as they bear witness to death and adversity because of issues around land and water. Even if we can't find such positive motivation, there should also be enough fear of the dire consequences for all the world, including our part of it, if we do nothing.

ALL-AGE ADDRESS

Offer the congregation the chance to vote for their favourite of 2 options – tailored to ages/interests, preferably with pictures, e.g.

Peppa Pig or Dora the Explorer

Teddy bear or rubber duck

Thomas the Tank Engine or James the Red Engine

Roald Dahl or J K Rowling books

Frozen or Minions

Strictly Come Dancing or X Factor

Cheese & onion or salt & vinegar crisps

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Cats or dogs

Bus or car

Etc.

Depending on ages/stages

- we all have choices, we make them every day. God is interested in all of our lives, what we do with all our time, how we care for other people and the world.
- could explore “why?” questions as you go along – discuss motivations, why we make choices, why God wants us to live caringly and generously for others and creation.
- could go further into lifestyle choices, e.g. transport, holidays home/abroad, recycling/not that influence our care for creation, issues that make that difficult, changes we could all make.

MUSICAL SUGGESTIONS

Hymn Books Used

Church Hymnary 4 (CH4) Common Praise (CP)

Hymns Ancient & Modern: New Standard Edition (AMNS)

Rejoice and Sing (RS) Singing the Faith (StF)

Hymns on Discipleship and Following Jesus

For ourselves no longer living	R&S			
Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go	AMNSCH4	MP	R&S	StF
I want Jesus to walk with me	CH4			
I want to walk with Jesus Christ	MP			
Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult	AMNSCH4	MP	R&S	StF
Lead us heavenly Father, lead us	AMNSR&S	MP	StF	

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Lord of creation, to you be all praise	CH4	R&S	StF		
One more step along the world I go	CH4	R&S	StF		
We are marching in the light of God	AMNSCH4	MP	R&S	StF	
Will you come and follow me	AMNSCH4	R&S	StF		

Hymns for This Week

The stars declare his glory	CH4				
Lord, teach me all your ways	CH4				
I shall praise you, O God	CH4				
God made me as I am	CH4				
Let all creation dance	CH4	AMNS			
Take up the song	CH4	AMNS			
God in such love for us	CH4				
Touch the earth lightly	CH4	AMNS	StF		
Sent by the Lord am I	CH4	AMNS	StF		
Inspired by love and anger	CH4	AMNS			
Beauty for brokenness	CH4	AMNS			
Father Eternal, Ruler of Creation	CH4				
Great God, your love has called us here	CH4	AMNS	R&S	StF	
Teach us, O loving heart of Christ	CH4				
One more step along the world I go	CH4	AMNS	R&S	StF	
Come, living God, when least expected	CH4	R&S			
For the healing of the nations	CH4	AMNS	R&S	StF	
'I have a dream', a man once said	CH4				
The one who longs to make us whole	CH4				
The peace of the earth be with you	CH4	AMNS	StF		



PRAYERS

CALL TO WORSHIP

The God of all invites you to come close.

We choose to come and follow.

The God of creation calls you to care.

We choose to come and listen.

The God of blessings wants you to flourish.

We choose to come and grow.

The God of life offers you life and love and hope.

We choose God's life, God's love and God's hope.

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Words in italic as could be used as a congregational response or for a second voice.

Blessed are those who seek God,

The God of wisdom,

The God of life,

The God of love.

You, God, are a God of blessings.

Blessed are those who follow Jesus,

Our friend,

Our teacher,

Our Lord.

You, Lord, are the Word of life.

Blessed are those who live in the Spirit,

The Spirit of peace,

The Spirit of challenge,

The Spirit of life.

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You, Spirit, are the source of growth.

Blessed are those who seek you, God,
And so we come,
Seeking your love, your way, your peace,

Offering our love, our choices, our worship,
Listening for wisdom, for challenge, for your ways.

Yet we know we have not always followed your path,
But have drifted in other directions.
We know we have not always looked wider,
To consider consequences for all your creation.
We know we have not always put love first,
But have sought temporary comfort in other things.

So as we turn back, as we come to you, as we seek you anew,
Pour out your love and forgiveness, that we might flourish,
And may we seek your flourishing for all people and all creation,
In our worship, in our choices, and in all things.

Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord Jesus, Lord of life,
You call us to follow,
And you warn us of the cost of discipleship,
As your love overwhelms all our life.

Lord of life, we pray today for those who pay a very high cost for faith,
As they face danger, persecution or death for what they believe.
We remember today those who cry out for peace
As they work in their communities and across the world to end conflict.
We pray today for those who speak up against systems of power,
As they seek to transform economics and politics for the good of all.
For all those who carry burdens and crosses to walk your ways,
We pray,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done.

Lord of life, we pray today for your creation, paying such a high price

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For our development, greed and progress.
We remember today the land that is no longer flourishing,
As water floods or runs dry and seeds cannot grow or bear fruit.
We pray today for the seas and all that is in them,
Where rising temperatures and major changes bring death.
For all creation, groaning in adversity,
We pray,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done.

Lord of life, we pray today for all people of developed nations,
Whose choices can shape the way ahead for all.
We remember today that we are all called to follow,
Choosing your way of life over all other things.
We pray today for those we influence,
Through our shopping, our voting and our speaking out.
For all of us, in our daily decisions,
We pray
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done.
Amen

COLLECT

God of all, you give us life, and in your generosity you give us freedom
To choose life and hope for us, for others, and for creation,
Or to turn away to dust and despair.
Fill us with your love, for ourselves, for others, and for creation,
That we would listen, we would follow,
And we would flourish in new fullness of life for all, whatever it brings.
Amen