

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

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".

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 2 – SEPTEMBER 11TH

KEEPING TO THE RIGHT PATH

THOUGHTS ON THE READINGS

LUKE 15:1-10

A combination of 'tax collectors' and 'sinners' - people consigned to the social and religious margins at that time - make the effort to listen to Jesus. Their presence and Jesus' acceptance results in grumbling from religious insiders, the scribes and Pharisees.

In response to such negative attitudes Luke says that Jesus 'told them this parable' (v.3). In fact Luke then gives us three parables from Jesus on this theme, featuring a lost sheep, a lost coin (and a lost child). An alternative perspective sees them as parables about a searching shepherd, a determined woman (and a welcoming parent).

As the parables are told, the ratio of lost to safe changes; one sheep in a hundred, one coin in ten (and one child in two). Yet the commitment of the shepherd, the woman (and the parent) is total and the scale of celebration at the end of each story is lavish.

The two parables in this reading take place in an outdoor setting and within the home; the rural landscape and the domestic scene. Whatever the setting, and whatever the proportion of the missing to the safe, Jesus suggests that God's care is consistently lavish. He also implies that this should characterize our attitudes and actions as well, particularly towards those we see as outside our group, whatever that group might be.

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17

This reflection on the "career" of Saint Paul expresses gratitude to Christ Jesus for a life radically changed in response to God's grace in his life. Paul's former life is characterised as being 'a blasphemer, a persecutor [of the Church], and a man of violence.' Now, in a radical turnaround, he has been strengthened, judged faithful and 'appointed to his [Christ's] service.' (v. 13)

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Like the searching shepherd and determined woman of Jesus' parables in Luke 15:1-10 God's commitment to Paul is total and lavish, some might say, disproportionate. God's grace is described as having 'overflowed'. Christ Jesus, through 'faith and love' (v. 14) and patience (v.16), has found Paul out, much as the shepherd finds the lost sheep and the woman the lost coin.

The 'saying that is sure and worthy of full acceptance' (v. 15), one that is often spoken in the context of worship, reassures us. After all, if Paul, this foremost among sinners can be strengthened, judged faithful, and appointed to service, then so can anyone else. The significance of human failings, shortcomings and wrongful actions should not be understated but the greater emphasis is always on God's grace and love.

EXODUS 32:7-14

It appears that God is a God of extremes. The lavish love which features in the readings from Luke and 1 Timothy is equalled by God's capacity for wrath: 'let me alone so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.' (v. 10) Many Christians are disconcerted by such an image.

Perhaps even more disconcerting for some is the concluding comment from the author of Exodus that God had a change of mind about the disaster he was about to visit upon the people. If God might have a change of mind what, if anything, we can rely upon in this world?

This story demonstrates that humanly constructed devices, by themselves, cannot be relied upon to overcome the problems that face us, individually and collectively, in this world. These include huge environmental challenges, which result from us taking a wrong turn, not unlike like ancient Israel which has turned aside from the way (v. 8), or the sheep that wandered off and got lost.

The story of Moses talking God around and God's change of mind gives us hope. A creator God does indeed have the capacity to burn up creation in a response of anger. Whatever God's capacity for anger and destruction, however, as Exodus reminds us, it is God's love and grace which wins out in the end.

PSALM 51:1-10

Other passages describe the lavish love of God but this one is lavish in its first-person description of human shortcoming and sin, where 'my sins are ever before

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me (v. 3) and the conviction is that 'I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.' (v. 5) All this, however, is firmly placed within the overarching context of God's 'steadfast love' and abundant mercy' (v.1) which should prevent descent into despair.

The statement that 'against you, you alone, have I sinned' (v. 4) is curious at first sight. Surely it is possible to sin against others as well. The psalmist might respond by saying that in hurting the others that God loves we do sin against God. How we treat the other that God loves, whether that be fellow human beings, other creatures, or even the fabric of this part of creation, affects our relationship with God.

God's loving forgiveness is described with images that imply a process – washing and purging, teaching wisdom, blotting out. Finally, in another phrase that has liturgical echoes, the cry is, 'create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a right spirit within me' (v. 10); a heart and spirit that values God and values God's creation.

SERMON THOUGHTS

Churches don't have a great track record as far as welcoming outsiders is concerned. Like many established groups we have to work hard at remaining open to others rather than excluding them.

This phenomenon is not new, as is demonstrated by the attitude of scribes and Pharisees towards tax collectors and sinners who come to listen to Jesus. They grumble about the welcome Jesus offers to these outsiders.

As Paul's "cv" demonstrates, however, he was not only an outsider as far as the early Church was concerned, but was its active opponent. Yet the ultimate outsider, once he was included within the group, became an outstanding activist and organiser on behalf of Christ Jesus.

What is true of outsider individuals can also be true of outsider ideas. Church people can be very suspicious or even hostile to ideas that originate outside the Christian community. In recent times, for example, calls to address constraints on the status and role of women has sometimes been resisted on the grounds that this originates in a feminist agenda that is external to the Church.

Likewise, it may be that part of a lack of enthusiasm within some churches to positively engage with ecological concerns arises from the fact that this call has come from outsiders.

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Yet who has wandered away from the path at this point? Is it those outside of churches who commend care for God's creation, even though they do not perceive it in such terms or use religious vocabulary? (Talk of 'creation' implies that there is a 'creator'.) Alternatively, perhaps it is those churchly 'insiders' who have become lost.

Churches that decline to see and act concerning God's creation, especially those that want to exclude it from church agendas and activities, risk being like a coin that has rolled away into a dark place. God is at work in the world. This world includes but is not defined by the church community. They do not have to stay there. Churches which move to celebrate God's world and seek to care for it through practical action are a cause for divine rejoicing.

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		
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		

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Hymns for this Week

Give to our God immortal praise	AMNSMP	R&S		
God is love: let heaven adore him	AMNSCH4	MP	R&S	StF
King of glory, King of peace	AMNSMP	R&S	StF	
O God, be gracious to me in your love	CH4	R&S		
O love of God, how strong, how true	MP	R&S		
O matchless beauty of our God	R&S			
O the love of my Lord is the essence	StF			
Praise, my soul, the King of heaven	AMNSCH4	MP	R&S	Stf
The King of love my shepherd is	AMNSCH4	MP	R&S	StF
The love of God is broad like beach and meadow		R&S		
Thy/Your ceaseless, unexhausted love	R&S	StF		

PRAYERS

CALL TO WORSHIP

God is calling to us now and is gathering us in,
To sing, to pray, to listen and to speak.

God is searching for us now and gathering us in,
To witness, to act, to share and speak out.

God is rejoicing for God has gathered us in.

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So rejoice with God, in song, word and prayer.

Let us worship God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON

'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.'
(Psalm 51:10)

O God, we have wandered away,
From caring for your world,
From welcoming the outsider,
From trusting in you.

Silence

And then we hear your word for us:

'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' (Luke 15:6)

O God, we have dug ourselves into a hole,
When caring only for ourselves,
When thinking it is our church, not yours,
When believing only we can make things better.

Silence

And then we hear your word to us:

'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' (Luke 15:9)

So it is true ...

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'The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' (1 Timothy 1:15)

Rejoice with God!

Give thanks to God!

Amen.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Response

Come, searching God,

Find us and save us.

Loving God,

We pray for your world,

Stained by our thoughtless pollution,

Threatened by our use of coal and oil and gas,

Deprived of many species made extinct.

Encourage and strengthen all who care for your creation.

Come, searching God,

Find us and save us.

We pray for a world in danger of being lost,

Lost to the horrors of human conflict,

Lost to incidents of injustice,

Lost to poverty in the midst of riches.

Encourage and strengthen all who seek peace, bring justice, and create wealth.

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Come, searching God,

Find us and save us.

We pray for your Church, as a place with space for the outsiders,

Welcoming original thinkers with their new ideas,

Welcoming diverse people with their many experiences,

Welcoming hurt people who we have pushed away.

Encourage and strengthen us to welcome others as you have welcomed us.

Come, searching God,

Find us and save us.

We pray for your Church, to be a joyful celebrant of your creation,

In our singing and our praying, in our preaching and our sharing,

In our scriptural explorations and our Spirit-filled conversations,

In our prayerful decision-making and in reaching out to our communities.

Come, searching God,

Find us and save us.

You are the good shepherd who brings us to safety,

You are the determined woman who brings us into the light,

And so, with confidence we pray,

Come, searching God,

Find us and save us.

Amen

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