

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Creation Time – Week Four

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – 27 September 2020

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank the Creation Time 2020 writing group for their thoughts on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Our new online music resource is now live: [here](#) you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). The search function allows you to bring up a list of songs by keyword, tune, theme, author, composer and metre, covering all of the indexes in the hymnbook. The site features Weekly Worship and thematic/seasonal playlists, alternative settings and background information on the hymns.

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Introduction

Creation Time / Season of Creation is a worldwide call to prayer and action from 1 September to 4 October (the Feast of St Francis of Assisi). September's reflections on the lectionary passages are set against the background of the extreme urgency of the climate crisis and the challenges that confront every one of us: to change our own lives and to support and encourage others in the just transition to a world where all will be better able to weather the turmoil that undoubtedly lies ahead. The Covid-19 crisis, overlaying this, had broken by the time these pieces were being written, and the additional pressures on writers who have contributed may be noted.

Our writers are drawn from a variety of church backgrounds and pastoral contexts, and all share, as Pope Francis has said, a 'Common Home', and have a contribution to make to the healing partnership of Christ with God's Creation. In our readings and our thoughts on them, we see, ever more, that the most environmental themes of all are compassion, forgiveness, hope, and the empowerment of the love of God. These are threads that run throughout the whole of Scripture, and sustain us in our partnership with Creation day by day.

[Exodus 17:1-7](#)

This story is one of a series which can be seen as rebellions or tests of the Hebrew people, which get increasingly exhausted responses from Moses and gracious provision by God. These relate to many of the most basic needs of human beings: clean, safe water (see also 15:22-27), food (v.16), and security (17:8-16) – which are not unreasonable issues to raise with those in leadership.

There is an increasing threat to those basic needs because of the climate emergency – access to safe water is reduced by shrinking glaciers, disrupted rainfall patterns, drought and floods. Those threats clearly affect access to food, and conflict over water brings security risks. God's desire to see those needs met should influence our lifestyle and policy choices.

There are also familiar dynamics at work, when a difficult situation finds people seeking someone to blame and someone to do something to fix it. Here the people attribute blame to Moses, either choosing to ignore the agency of God in their situation or avoiding a more difficult discussion. Faced with the many challenges on the Earth, we all face the temptation either to blame others, expect someone else (governments, corporations) to fix it, or avoid facing up to a difficult bigger picture.

One way of considering the story would be as a film scene:

Cast: Within the story, Moses and the Narrator recognise the active involvement of Moses, the people, a group of elders within the people, and the Lord. However, the people do not appear to acknowledge the agency of the Lord in this episode, directing all their questions and complaints to Moses alone.

Location: This is a stop on a journey from the wilderness of Sin (picture a movie montage or a map). It is clearly rocky and dry. The reference in verse 6 to the rock at Horeb places it at the Mountain of God, although 19:2 suggests there is further journeying to get there – the editor may have used some poetic licence in ordering the scenes. (Horeb and Sinai are both used for the Mountain in Exodus.)

Timeline: a) The use of the staff which struck the Nile (v.5) could bring flashbacks to 4:1-5 then 7:14-21 (and more). These were actions meant to demonstrate who the Lord was – to Moses as well as to Pharaoh. Verses 14-21 are a mirror image of verses 1-7: then the water was made undrinkable; here those with nothing to drink are given clear water.

b) There are also glimpses forward. The Lord goes ahead of Moses to the rock at Horeb, looking ahead to the greater revelation of the Law on the Mountain, meeting another fundamental need of the people, to know God's ways.

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[Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16](#)

The beginning of Psalm 78 is unusual because it is not addressed to God but to “my people,” placing it within the wisdom traditions of the Hebrew Bible.

The psalm is often called historical, recounting the story of God's care of Israel in the wilderness, and Israel's woeful response. But the poem does not follow a chronological order, because this is not the aim of the Psalmist, who calls it a “parable” to give it importance, with “dark sayings” or mysteries or riddles, giving it enigmatic dimensions. The poet is full of wonder. It's the figurative re-telling of a story.

The Mosaic stories provide the geographical setting for our theological understanding of God's covenant – God's guardianship and tutelage of rebellious humanity. Israel's vocation was to be a distinct and representative presence in the world, contemplating the world, and

mediating and upholding the presence of God in the world. However, Israel rebelled against God, when the people quickly forgot that, in the wilderness, the basic essentials of life, both bodily and spiritual needs, were provided for them by God's act of free grace.

How can we re-imagine the text and bridge the gulf between the ancient religious world and our contemporary secular world so that we can learn how to trust in God and not forget the divine teaching? We share some things in common. The wilderness wanderings of the Israelites, as re-told by the Psalmist, come from the perspective not of a desert-dweller but of one who had become domesticated; notions of wilderness and lostness were counterintuitive and their agricultural economy was dependent on the God of Israel. When they felt that God had let them down, they put their faith in other gods and the work of their own hands.

Our contemporary 'chaos' has come about through our materialistic daily living. The causes of climate change and the spread of Covid-19 are a consequence of our actions. In a sense, God is inviting us back into the wilderness to be tested, to hold us to account, to hear again the spirit of wisdom. But to argue that our current situation is divine punishment would be a misinterpretation. Punishment implies a judicial process, so where's the justice in the disproportionate effect that this existential crisis is having on the vulnerable, the poor and the marginalised?

God is not punishing us. This is not divine wrath. The God of Jesus feels and suffers with us. We are being called to face up to what we have done. We are living in a world that is part of God's dominion, so we must become participators in a new creativity that will bring us through the chaos of the waters, standing "like a heap", ready to engulf us. The key lesson is that our systems of life, our economics and our politics are being tested and that we need to re-learn God's wisdom to discover the route to a sustainable and healthy world.

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[Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32](#)

'Leaning into the green'? – enough with the climate change excuses, already! Don't dare escape into collective fatalism. It's up to each one of us to act now to avoid environmental ruin.

It's no good pointing helpless, hopeless fingers at past perpetrators of crimes against the planet. "We're all doomed" won't cut it. It is indefensible/immoral to write off our

responsibility for the environmental mess we are in. It's time to take action to make things better for future generations. Stop dwelling on the incremental, death-dealing tragedy of climate change – turn away from contributing to all the degradation and pollution, and live. We've to get ourselves a new heart and a new spirit, pronto.

Ezekiel is a seriously weird, grotesque and tantalising book – and that's the verdict of serious biblical scholars! Throughout the book, Ezekiel the priest/prophet exhibits what we might be tempted to diagnose as signs of mental illness. These are not to be written off, but rather we should realise that the extreme nature of the language and imagery results from the sense of urgency for change which makes these scriptures relevant and appropriate for our day and world.

Ezekiel sees himself as witness to (sentinel over) Israel and writes from exile in Babylon.

Ezekiel responds to the Israelite tradition that “the sins of the parents are visited upon the children” by arguing that each individual is responsible for their sins. The question of responsibility would have been crucial during the Exile. The sour grapes proverb handily deflects responsibility into the past, in a tone of complacent self-pity. But now is the time for the people to get themselves “a new heart”.

The text is grounded in “the land of Israel” but calls to “the house of Israel” – how we treat one another and our environment are inextricably linked and interdependent.

This chapter identifies *collective* sins as the problem. This is pertinent for an assessment of our global emergencies. A fixation on small individual misdemeanours can mean we miss the point. Repentance is not a matter of bearing guilt as a burden, neither is it the cultivation of remorse or regret. Instead, it is the first step toward transformation – what Ezekiel calls getting a new heart and a new spirit. Repentance is an active, deliberate step in a new direction. It is a step into the future, into life itself.

Ezekiel nonetheless gives value to the individual as a moral agent and the present moment as the moment of moral significance. Like our small-scale environmental initiatives, righteous action is not pointless, as some of the exiles claim (33:10). Ezekiel articulates a responsibility and opportunity for each individual to “turn, then, and live” on the basis of new choices and righteous acts.

Ezekiel leads us into reflection on what we have begun to see as ‘generational justice’ – as well as the longing of many in our own generations that those who follow after them might bless, rather than curse our current conduct in the face of emergency. This gives context to

our reading of this conversation of the prophet with a God who gives every opportunity for a change of course, but stopping short of making the decision for a people hell-bent on catastrophe, whilst blaming everyone else.

The key question, then, from an incredulous God, is: “Why will you die, O house of Israel?”

Why choose what you know is the wrong path?

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[Psalm 25:1-9](#)

This may be one of those many parts of scripture which have given comfort through the identification of emotional and national turmoil, rather than offering an exemplary outlook on life, or a model of robust and gracious worship. Even the grim verses of the book of Lamentations – in which people still think it’s worth crying out to God when all rational hope seems gone – are now helping to encourage and sustain folk in places where environmental damage has permanently disrupted daily life.

Reassurance seems far from the hopes of this desperate, immature, and fragile singer, who needs to be able to rely on forgiveness, who is vulnerable to embarrassment and looking, perhaps rather too much, for God to do everything for them; even holding God to account on the off-chance that God will turn out to be the One they hoped God might be. All of this, we hear and assess.

The Psalms here offer us a role-play to learn about some of the deepest, and not always most admirable parts of who we are under pressure. But role-playing comes into its own when we also take care with the debrief. In this song, we feel what it’s like. Then, thank God, we can also come to ourselves.

As a poem preserved with reverence over centuries, its naked emotional honesty is almost too much to bear. The singer even grovelingly hopes to win favour by cursing the enemies of God.

Perhaps at the end of the psalm, when the singer had exhausted this barrage of protective and defensive words, they might have been able to hear the loving, forgiving, enabling voice of God. Our widely shared predicament is the feeling of helplessness, which is both realistic,

as regards 'solutions', and yet far from it, as regards the value of our commitment and participation in the care of Creation.

Finding texts such as this in our Holy Scriptures, we realise that 'it's all right not to be all right', and that if that's the case, then there's every reason to turn to God, as and when and how we are, right now.

Rev David Coleman is Environmental Chaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland and a member of the Iona Community.

Philippians 2:1-13

At the core of this reading is the well-known 'Christ Hymn' of verses 6-11. It's tempting to rush headlong into the hymn and miss the wisdom in the verses that enclose it. The whole passage advocates humble service, but while the great example of Christ's humility is exemplary, the surrounding verses give us some clues about how we ordinary Christians can follow that great example.

In Chapter 1 of the letter, Paul has used his own suffering to encourage the Philippian Christians in their hardships. Now, in 2:1-2, he urges them to have the same mind as him, in love, fellowship in the Spirit, compassion and sympathy. These are virtues that can be chosen, but if they feel too abstract, in verse 3 Paul contrasts ambition and pride with the humility that regards others as better than one's self, and chooses to serve the interests of others. From attitude to action, this is how the readers of this letter can, like Paul, find hope and courage in the face of adversity.

There is a contrast between these verses and the hubris that can come out of, say, Genesis 1:26ff and Psalm 8:5-8. Indeed, once Paul moves from his own example to that of Jesus ("have the same mind", vv.2, 5), the resonances with the early chapters of Genesis are stronger. In Eden, Adam and Eve grasp at becoming like God, as do the people of Babel. There, ambition and pride are followed by fall and loss as they exploit their power to serve their own interests. In the case of Jesus, the trajectory is opposite. Starting in the form of God, Jesus refused to use that for His own advantage. Instead Jesus emptied Himself, humbling Himself to human form and a shameful death, which resulted in His exaltation. Jesus restores the proper place of humanity in creation: to serve the good of all. Adam and Eve were appointed to tend and keep the garden – they were there for Eden, it wasn't there for them. The same principle was true of Abraham (blessed to be a blessing, Genesis 12:2-3), Israel ("a priestly kingdom", Exodus 19:6) and this principle was chosen by Jesus. It is the calling of those who would follow Him.

This laying aside of hubris and ambition and instead acting in open-handed humility to serve the good of others is the way of salvation for all creation. This may be what Paul means by vv.12-13, as he reminds his readers that God is at work in their work of service, resulting in God's good pleasure – perhaps another echo of Genesis 1, where the flourishing of all creation as God intended it invoked the response: “It is very good.”

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Matthew 21:23-32

Today we are privileged to read one of the immensely significant body of stories of Jesus, effectively yelling, “Get on with it!” to those who ought to know better than to keep things as they are. As this passage shows, arguing about matters of authority when the truth is staring you in the face is not likely to get us very far.

In the wake of such acute crises as we have encountered in recent months, we can now add to this how dangerous it might be to long for a return to ‘the way things always were.’ Change is inevitable and irrevocable. We get used to it, or perish. We are not even the same people, or the same churches that we were at the beginning of this year.

Power and privilege, in religion as in politics, can entrench the status quo, and hinder the vital responsiveness that goes with the leadership of any sustainable society. ‘Talking the talk’ is often an effective way to avoid ‘walking the walk’. In recent years the Church has learned to talk positively about ‘Creation’, and about ‘stewardship’ as though our fellow creatures were mere property that we were paid to take care of. The science is sufficiently clear, authoritative, and prominent: if you want to survive in time of crisis, the status quo has to go.

And yet, beyond movements like EcoCongregation and Eco-church, the sacrificial lead is being taken by young climate strikers and non-violent protesters. But this mandate is not just “of human origin” (v.26), but from God. It is a covenant, to be responsible – as the head of a long-standing family business might be, rather than merely as an employee – for what we are part of: the entirety of the world. A world that God loves so much that “He gave His only Son....”

In Jesus’ response to the attack on His credentials, we also note that those most marginalised (the tax-collectors and prostitutes) may also be the most responsive to the pressure to change. Those whom we most overlook may be the ones to watch, when we’re

seeking direction. Or those living in poverty, and on the sharp-end of climate change, who have nothing further to lose.

Finally, trust, explore and test your own inspiration and reaction to Scripture, and to world events. As a Christian writer on environmental matters, I'm frequently frustrated that so few people, even amongst scholars, are prepared to take the risk of coming out with what they really think and feel. It seems Jesus had the same problem. But here, He is equal to it!

Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.

Sermon ideas

As Creation Time draws to a close, Creation remains in crisis. God is still with us, on God's own terms.

If this year hasn't yet convinced all of us to set aside – or at least to reassess – the old books and sayings we have relied on to support our use of Scripture, and ask afresh: “what *is* the Spirit saying to the churches?” (cf. Revelation 2:29, 3:22 ff), I dread to think what it will take.

Fires of unprecedented scope and ferocity, a speeding up of the rise in sea-levels and the melting of glaciers, and then, of course, the Coronavirus wake-up call, do not simply remind us, but reprove us that the old way of life in living memory is at best unsustainable, and at worst, destructive – not just to our own way of life, but that of so many other species too.

Christianity offers diverse ‘models of God’, but specifically through the gift of Christ, sharing in the bodily life of the Earth, we trust that God touches our own hearts and shares in our own trials.

We still have a chance to discover the benefits of a humility (Philippians 2) both as individuals and as a species, which corrects, once and for all, the abusive interpretation of our purpose on earth as ‘domination’ (Genesis 1:26-28). Instead we can see this purpose as one of compassionate management in partnership with the planet, and life as the ‘senior partner’ in the covenant.

This humility is not disengagement, but a sincere seeking after our place and purpose as God's people; as catalytic participants in the community of the World. With this humility we accept the responsibility to pray, do and be what we can, and to seek transformation, instead of tilting at the windmills of control and solution (Ezekiel 18).

The wilder stretches of Christian scripture, like the book of Ezekiel, have always been handled with care, and are a minefield for fools who rush in and try to pin down what each verse might 'mean'. Nonetheless, the spiritual literature of crisis in the Bible supports *us* as we face up to crisis. We find solidarity even in the creative desperation of some of the Psalms and Prophets. Our faith has seldom been so vital to our own survival, and it really doesn't matter if we've got it wrong until now (cf. the story Jesus tells of the son who changed his mind).

After this year, will Jesus say to us: "Even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe"? (Matthew 21:32).

Rev David Coleman, EcoChaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.

Prayers

These prayers are based on motifs and themes found in the lectionary readings for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost. I have tried to write them in a way which will work with whichever of the OT readings are used. The thing that struck me as I read these texts was that they all, in some way or other, relate to foundational stories – the things which (knowingly or unknowingly) inform and shape our sense of who we are, whether as individuals, families, political or religious groupings. Many of the huge issues with which we are grappling in 2020 – climate change and the emergence of Covid-19 among them – deeply challenge some of the narratives which we take as givens and ask us to reflect critically on whether they are helpful, necessary, or indeed even true – and whether we need to reimagine the world and our own identity and actions within it. Just as the Gospel does, in fact!

Opening responses

I have split the responding voices into two; a male/female binary can be seen as excluding, so the voices may be allocated by different criteria as appropriate.

Leader: We meet in the name of God
Voice 1: whose speech began the story of life
Voice 2: whose words brought form into being
All: and who ordered creation in harmony and goodness.

L: We meet in the purpose of Jesus
V1: whose life was the speech of God,
V2: whose words show the shape of His Kingdom
All: and who draws those who hear into its unfolding story.

L: We meet in the power of the Spirit
V1: whose breath tamed the primordial chaos
W: whose tongue shapes the words of change
All: and who energises the ones who give them voice.

L: We meet in the name of the Triune God
the Source, the Sharer, and the Shaper,
**All: Who was, and is, and will be
as long as the Story of Love is told.**

Approach

I have included optional words [*] which can be used if the service involves Communion.

L: God, in the story of Your people
on their journey through the wilderness
**All: we see and hear many things
which we know and recognise.**

L: God, in the words of Your Son
as He journeyed through life
**All: we see and hear many things
which challenge our cherished ideas.**

L: God, in the passage of Your Spirit
as She journeys through history
**All: we see and hear many things
which show us that change is possible.**

L: God, constantly present in human story,
we open ourselves
to all that You would show us now
through worship and song
word and prayer,
[bread and wine]

**All: Meet us where we are
show us where we need to be
and then go with us as we move.**

Thanksgiving

We say together –

God the Source

**we give You thanks that,
from the very beginning,
You have been part of creation –
inextricably woven into its story;
feeling its glory and greyness;
knowing its potentials and possibilities.**

Jesus the Sharer

**we give You thanks that,
through Your humble Incarnation,
You became part of the human story –
inextricably woven into its experiences;
feeling its delights and dilemmas;
knowing its potentials and possibilities.**

Spirit the Shaper

**we give You thanks that,
throughout all stories of human history,
You have been part of the arc towards justice –
inextricably woven into its trajectory;
feeling its freedoms and frustrations;
knowing its potentials and possibilities.**

Triune Three –

**Source, Sharer, and Shaper,
we give You thanks that,
though we may not understand You,
yet You understand us and our stories
and help us
discover and explore their potential
and enter and engage with their possibilities.**

Confession (said by all)

O God

**You intended the world to be a place
of provision and plenty for all.**

**We confess that sometimes
in our attitudes or actions
we have taken more than we need
at the expense of others.**

**Forgive us,
and by Your Spirit
help us as we try to live differently
in the week ahead.**

Silence or Kyrie

O God

**You intended the world to be a place
of fairness and flourishing for all.**

**We confess that sometimes
in our attitudes and actions
we have lived as though
we alone mattered.**

**Forgive us,
and by Your Spirit
help us as we try to live differently
in the week ahead.**

Silence or Kyrie

O God

**You intended the world to be a place
in which all play their part
in the health and wholeness of creation.**

**We confess that sometimes
in our attitudes and actions
we have avoided our responsibilities
or prevented others from fulfilling theirs.**

**Forgive us,
and by Your Spirit
help us as we try to live differently
in the week ahead.**

Silence or Kyrie

Assurance of forgiveness

I have offered two possible options: in one the prayer is said by the whole congregation and in the other by the person leading the service. In the latter instance the leader can use 'we/us' or 'you', as appropriate.

Either

**All: God
the life and words of Your Son –
His compassion and care for others
even as He Himself was dying –
assure us
of the generous depths
of Your forgiveness
and of its restorative power.**

**Help us now
through the energy of Your Spirit
to love and live differently,
that we, and our world,
might become
all that You intended.**

Amen

or

The life and words of Jesus
even as He was dying
assure [us]
of the generous depths
of God's forgiveness
and of its restorative power.

Through the energy of the Spirit
may God help [us] now
to love and live differently,
that [we] and this world
might become
all that God intended.
Amen

Collect

God – Source, Sharer, Shaper –
though You have many names
Your story moves constantly and consistently
towards a world
in which all can flourish
as You intended.
Help us to grow in clear-sightedness
of how our own names or narratives
can hinder our understandings
of Your love and purpose,
that we may join more fully
in the story of Your Kingdom.
Amen

Blessing

May the God whose names are many
but whose nature is constant,
the One whose story is complex,
but whose purpose is clear,
enable [us] to deepen in love,
develop in understanding,
and be determined in action

that [we] and the world [we] inhabit
can move ever nearer
to that which God intends.
Amen

Dr Pat Bennett has a dual background in science and theology and a particular interest in the connections between relational experience, health, and flourishing. She is a member of the Iona Community and regularly produces liturgical and theological resources for them, for Wild Goose Publications, and the Spirituality of Conflict project: spiritualityofconflict.com

Prayers of intercession in Creation Time

The situation was changing so fast during the Covid-19 crisis that particular pressing concerns could not be anticipated. We therefore offer a framework of intercessions to take us through the Season of Creation.

Let us pray with Christ:

God, who makes us with the Earth
God, who gives us to the world
God-with-us in our struggles

Hear our fears and needs

Hold our hand as You walk beside us

Advise, encourage and guide us.

We pray for the world:

Reflect on some of the key global news events this week.

- Are there people or communities in need, or others that can be thankful?
- Are there reports of progress or setbacks to bring to God?
- Can we pray in sorrow or in hope for events that make us feel overwhelmed?
- Can we hear the Earth's voice in any of these stories that we need to bring in prayer?
- Which of our human, animal or environmental neighbours do we need to bring before God?
- Bring our enemies and those we fear to God today and
- Pray for peace throughout Creation

**God-with-us,
Hear our fears and needs
Hold our hand as You walk beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us.**

We pray for the Church:

- Give thanks for the faithfulness of the church community, and its undergirding of prayer
- Acknowledge any national or local divisions within the church and pray that God's wisdom and discernment will be sought
- Seek guidance on how the Church can increase and weave environmental concerns into our life and work
- Pray for a desire to experience the joy of a deeper fellowship with all Creation

**God-with-us,
Hear our fears and needs
Hold our hand as You walk beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us.**

We pray for ourselves:

- In silence, we bring our personal concerns to God, who knows and understands our deepest thoughts
- Ask God for support and perseverance when we struggle, and a sustaining sign when we get things right
- Pray for those beside us, acknowledging and respecting what they cannot share with us
- Ask God for a sense of impatience for change, rather than accepting the way things are
- Pray for peace in our hearts, and the fuller joys of Christ in our lives.

**God-with-us,
Hear our fears and needs
Hold our hand as You walk beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us.
Amen**

Alternative Material

This material has been supplied by kind permission of Spill the Beans and allows you to explore the readings or theme of the service in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

Bible Notes

Quarrelling and Testing – [Exodus 17:1-7](#)

How do we remember places we have visited? We might think we remember the architecture, the sights, the sounds. What we are really remembering is what we did when we were in that place. It might have been sight-seeing, so we remember places. But it might be something else.

A memory may be very personal, remembering a small village in France because that was where the car broke down on that family holiday, for instance, or it may be communal. Throughout the Old Testament we are frequently told why a certain place is called what it is called, and it is usually because of what happened there.

This is the case in today's story, where the place in which the community finds replenishment is given not one but two names. Massah for 'testing' and Meribah for 'quarrelling'. These could not be more appropriate names for the site where the people moaned and argued to Moses and Aaron about the predicament they had been led into.

Last week we saw how the people realised that God was providing for them with their daily manna. Today we have a second account of water being provided by God. Earlier in Exodus 15:22-27 we read how the bitter water of Marah was made good to drink after God told Moses to throw a plank of wood into the water. Here there is no water at all.

Make no mistake, people would have been used to working hard to find water, and yet still they moaned. They didn't know where to look, they might find themselves travelling huge distances in search of a watering hole or spring. Back in Egypt, they knew where to go.

As the people pile onto Moses their frustration and concern, he prays to God in anguish. Again the people are testing God. Moses realises this, even if the Hebrews don't seem to have understood this is what they are doing. It is not Moses that is the provider, it is God.

Moses's prayer is answered, and in another display of gracious patience and generous providing, God provides water from a rock after Moses strikes it with his staff.

Will the people respond in trust and faith to a further example of God's generosity towards them? Or will they return to bickering with each other and with Moses?

Anyone who has been involved in local community work will know that it too is hard work. Even when generous provision is provided from an outside funding source, for example, the personalities at the local level can go to extraordinary lengths to try to jeopardise that funding by their internal bickering.

There is no doubt about it, building a community is not easy going. It is hard work. Moses was endlessly reminded of this fact as he journeyed with his fellow Hebrews. Even the unifying authority of the one God did not mean they were immune to quarrelling and testing.

Retelling for Young People

Tell the children that they are going to need to participate in this telling of the story, suggesting as many drinks as they can remember.

Set the scene by talking about how the Israelites had been travelling for a long time, there was not much food around and little water. Get everyone to form a line behind you and trudge around the room until you get to the Sinai mountain.

There were many children there and they started complaining, "I'm thirsty! I need a drink!"

Their mums said there was nothing to drink... but they kept on asking: "Is there any Irn Bru to drink?" "Is there any milk to drink?" – get the children to come up with their own responses.

But there was nothing, not even any water. Until ... God told Moses to strike a rock with his staff and then God provided beautiful, clean, cool water for everyone.

Activities

Gathering activity

Ask people to turn to a few folk sitting near them and to talk about local place names and how they came about. Link this with the significance of the giving of the names Massah ('test') and Meribah ('arguing') in the Bible story.

“COMMUNITY”: Together come up with an acronym to describe what community is.

Make your own Lemonade

You will need: 1 litre sparkling water, two lemons (to juice), caster sugar, food colouring (optional), jug, cups.

Add the lemon juice to the sparkling water and add a little caster sugar to taste. You could make this a fancy colour with food colouring if desired. Stir well and serve. This is a way to celebrate water, and the many different ways we can use it.

Reflection – Love One Another

Love one another...
even those who are always complaining?

Love one another...
even those who don't do their share?

Love one another...
even those who talk about me
behind my back?

Love one another...
what if they're stand offish?

Love one another...
what if they won't look my way?

Love one another...
what if they've already written me off?

Love one another...
I don't have the energy.
Love one another...
some folk are hard to love.

Love one another...
I'm managing fine on my own.

Love one another...

Prayers

Call to Worship

Pour water from a jug into a basin for each of the lines.

In the wilderness there is one thing to seek ... water.
Among the stones there is one thing to look for... life.
Between the crags there is one thing to find ... God.

This is the gift
of ever present love
found
new every morning,
under every rock.

Water Blessing

Cover a board or table with newspapers with stories of people in the wilderness, or people complaining. Introduce these stories, then invite the congregation to symbolically redeem the world by placing a hand in a bowl of water and making a handprint on the newspaper stories.

Closing Prayer

Refreshed with the living water,
sustained by the bread of life,
encouraged by the witness of generations,
let us go from this place
motivated and excited,
with anticipation and zeal,
ready for the hard work
you would have us do.

May we be your servants,
in our home,
in our church,
in our community,
in our world.
Send us out in trust and faith.

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Musical suggestions

You can hear samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4).

You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.

- CH4 277 – “Hark the glad sound!” – Often used during Advent but this paraphrase speaks into today's Gospel passage
- CH4 356 – “Meekness and majesty” – This song explores the contrasts of Christ being both human and divine
- CH4 458 – “At the name of Jesus” – A classic hymn inspired by lines from Philippians
- CH4 464 – “Though hope desert my heart” – We are reminded that in times of doubt, like the Israelites experience, God has been there before us
- CH4 537 – “We do not hope to ease our minds” – This song challenges us to ask hard questions about what it means to stand with Christ
- CH4 622 – “We sing a love that sets all people free” – We ask for God’s love to guide our hearts in how we live
- “People of the Lord” (https://archive.gregscheer.com/praise/people_of_the_lord.html) – This setting of the psalm is in an uncommon time signature but can be picked up by ear
- “High in the heavens” (https://www.resoundworship.org/song/high_in_the_heavens) – We are encouraged to have the same servant attitude as Christ

“The Philippians Hymn” (<https://malcolmgordon.bandcamp.com/track/the-philippians-hymn>) – Written by a Presbyterian minister from New Zealand

- New hymn-poem – “Our legacy” (Rev David Coleman) – There is a need to counteract the doom and gloom of the attitude that humanity is a ‘virus that infests the Earth’. Rather, we should claim our place and purpose of managing and enhancing life on earth, as well as being aware of the human injustice that has led to the crises of the environment in God’s Creation. The hymn-poem below also picks up on the whingeing problem encountered by Ezekiel in this week’s reading. Can be sung to a tune with a DCM metre, e.g. Kingsfold [CH4 291], or any other DCM tune which has a change of mood mid-verse.

Our legacy is dire, our people
trample down the Earth
through fire and smoke and slavery
abundance turns to dearth.

Yet Christ, opposing, crucified
and risen, to transform
with hope enlists each one of us
to turn from endless harm.

We moan, and claim despair our lot
as if that comfort brought
And crises wait in line to bring
our vaunted wealth to naught

Yet each new day brings hope and opens
doors we never saw
The risen Christ defies denial
and only love is law.

We are not creatures yet to come
We’re called to choose right now
dependent on the bees, the trees,
the soil we tend, the plough,

We won’t infest, no: we’ll invest
our love, our wisdom deep
in hope beyond horizons bleak:
Sustaining-Christ’s bequest!

In addition to the [Creation Time playlist online](#), the following songs are also suitable throughout this season:

- MP 1170 – “Indescribable” – The wonders of creation show us how amazing God is.
- MP 1268 – “Creation sings the Father’s song” – Picks up themes of Christ’s return bringing peace to all creation
- “Let creation sing” (Hillsong) <https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs/4433390/let-creation-sing> – Inspired by Psalm 148, which describes all of creation praising the Lord
- “From life’s beginning / Let praise resound” (Resound Worship) <https://www.resoundworship.org/song/from-lifes-beginning-let-praise-resound> – An uplifting call to worship, almost stadium anthem like
- “Come one, come all” (Malcom Gordon) – <https://malcolmgordon.bandcamp.com/track/come-one-come-all-2> – Written by a Presbyterian minister from New Zealand, this is based on Psalm 65 and would be particularly appropriate for communion during Creation Time
- “Rejoice in all your works” (Wendell Kimbrough) <https://wendellk.bandcamp.com/track/rejoice-in-all-your-works-psalm-104> – A setting of Psalm 104 which concludes with a nice Trinitarian creation doxology

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