

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Creation Time – Week One

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 6 September 2020

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank the Creation Time 2020 writing group for their thoughts on the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost – [CTBI's 'Climate Sunday'](#).

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 12:1-14](#)

"The food shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat it." (v.4)

Fair shares. The meal is eaten in community. Nothing is wasted.

We can recognise that this may be a difficult passage for pacifists and vegetarians. Other folks will find significant challenges elsewhere! Here, in the devotional life of God's people we encounter wholesale slaughter and blood. Firstborn animals are struck down, as well as humans.

As we have encountered this year, when people are under pressure, Times and Seasons still give shape to our lives. Here, Passover is declared to be Day One of Year One.

Freedom beckons. We can resolve to start afresh – begin to treat creation differently. Sharing resources, acting inclusively and responsibly – not forgetting our ongoing need for memorials and community rituals to mark our salvation and liberation and our ongoing need to recommit to caring for creation, Sunday by Sunday, season by season.

These commandments begin with instructions about time, identifying that the current month will henceforth signify the beginning of the year for the Israelites. When the Israelites are no longer locked down as slaves, they will be able to take control of their time in ways they could not have done previously. The new year also signifies the start of a new way of life, when God will have redeemed the people from Egypt. These are communal commandments, addressed “to all the congregation of Israel” (Exodus 12:3). When they share the feast of the Passover together, people strengthen their ties. Verse 11 explains how the Israelites are to eat their meat: with sandals on, loins girded, and a staff in hand – ready to move. This first Passover was not an end in itself but the beginning of a new way of living and being.

In the Abrahamic faiths, chronological reckoning begins from what is considered the decisive point in history after which nothing remains the same. In Christendom, it is the birth of Christ; in the Islamic world the Hijra, Muhammed’s flight from Mecca; in Judaism it begins here, at the deliverance out of Egypt. Chronological reckoning began at that point where God was perceived to begin creating a community of redemption. In addition to experiencing God’s redemption, Israel becomes the people of God by memorialising it in a ritual for the sake of later generations who were not there to experience for themselves the transformation from slavery to freedom, from death to life.

This text is appointed for Maundy Thursday each year. The Gospel record conspicuously associates the death of Jesus with this Passover memorial. In the New Covenant way of memorialising, the death of Jesus is woven into the memory of divine action bringing deliverance. As in Egypt, we exist in this world as the people of God not solely by virtue of the death of Jesus, but also in our remembering of it.

The Israelites’ escape from Egypt is a well-known story – breaking free from Pharaoh’s control, it suggests the freedom to become a new people. In Exodus 12:1-14 the rite of passage begins with the Israelites’ status as slaves to Pharaoh (their old identity), advances to a period of preparation for the next stage (liminality), and concludes by crossing over into a new status as the people of God (their new identity). They are still in the land of Egypt on the verge of departure, so freedom is only a future hope. The occasion is fraught with danger, uncertainty and possibility.

The emphasis is both on God's salvation from bondage / shielding from death, and also the response of the community: they are to prepare for a journey. The saved community must be ready to go, must be prepared for a trek that will move through difficult terrain (v.11).

Patsy Thomson is Warden of Lay Readers for Moray, Ross & Caithness Diocese of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Psalm 149

This Psalm is almost in two halves; the first is easy to read as it is full of rejoicing and joy and resonates with our modern idea of a kind and just God. The second section is far more difficult to read in modern times, with its talk of vengeance and punishment, concepts that are alien to people today. Some people believe it was written to celebrate some great victory, possibly when David had taken the stronghold of Zion (2 Samuel 5:7). We may find the idea of v.6 strange, how can we praise God while holding a weapon of war?

Looking at the great changes in this psalm can remind us of how our relationship with creation has changed. We can look back through history when we lived in harmony with nature. The victory that this psalm celebrates took place during the Bronze Age and at that time there was no wholesale destruction of the Earth. People lived far more in harmony with nature, and mining for copper and tin were on a small scale.

The second part of this psalm is far more akin to the situation since the industrial revolution. We could be described as being at war with creation – pollution, emissions, massive mines for a variety of minerals, plants fed with artificial fertilisers. Wars usually end eventually, but it takes a lot of work to end a war: people need to accept that things have to change, to agree terms and eventually to live at peace together. We can do this with creation if we are willing to listen to the groaning of the world. We need to stop the war by reducing emissions, considering the environment in every decision that we make and returning to the start of the psalm, to “Sing to the LORD a new song” of freedom from the fear of rising oceans and climate chaos.

John Collings is a lay preacher in the United Reformed Church, trustee of EcoCongregation Scotland, Secretary of Church & Society Committee URC in Scotland

Ezekiel 33:7-11

This passage comes from the prophet Ezekiel, called by God to be a prophet to the people of Israel. The early part of this chapter offers an image of the prophet as a ‘sentinel’ (v.7) – a guard, employed to stand and keep watch over the city, whose role was to warn the people if danger was imminent. The sentinel was not responsible for whether the people took heed

of the warning and responded well. Their task was simply to blow the trumpet and warn the people – the people’s response was in their own hands.

It is in this context that we see Ezekiel’s message of warning to the people of Israel. The passage can be split into two parts. Firstly, verses 7-9 show God telling Ezekiel his role. If Ezekiel shares the message God sends him and the people do not respond, that is their fault. If he does not share the message and the people are placed in danger, then Ezekiel is to blame.

Secondly, verses 10-11 set out the message that God wants Ezekiel to pass on, articulating the collective guilt of the people of Israel – they have realised their sins, and believe that their struggles are connected to their transgression (v.10). In response, Ezekiel emphasises God’s desire for renewal and redemption. God cares much less for the punishment of the wicked than for the renewal of those who recognise their sin and turn towards a different journey. It is this call, therefore, to turn back to God that Ezekiel shares with the people of Israel.

Splitting the passage into these two sections helps us to consider the different messages. In the first few verses, the reader can more easily place themselves in Ezekiel’s shoes. What is our role in sharing the warnings we hear from creation’s cries, as we witness the effects of the climate crisis and other injustice? What role does the church have to play in standing watch over creation, and calling the people of God to respond when danger threatens our communities?

The second part of the passage enables us to position ourselves as the people of Israel, as we both hear and respond to the cries of warning. Who are the sentinels – the prophets – standing watch and warning that danger is coming our way today? Do we listen to their cry? Furthermore, how do we respond? The cry of the people in verse 10 suggests that the danger is not only coming from outside of the city walls but from within. Where is our collective guilt, in accepting responsibility for the dangers before us? And when we realise this, what should our response be? Adopting this perspective as we read the passage also gives us the chance to hear and receive God’s merciful response, and the call to renewal as a way forward.

Hannah Brown (Methodist) is the Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer for the Joint Public Issues Team (in which the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church consider matters of justice and peace).

Psalm 119:33-40

Psalm 119 is an alphabetic acrostic (a poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, message or alphabet), in which its 176 verses are divided into stanzas of eight verses, each beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This was a common wisdom teaching aid, partly to catch the attention and partly to aid memory in public or private recitation.

Its aim was to provide instruction in the faith and how to live well, through adherence to the Torah, the law of God, for the safety and wellbeing of all (as we ourselves have experienced in lockdown this year). It is common in the Hebrew language for a word to have a number of different meanings, each to be interpreted in context, so 'torah', usually translated as 'law', can refer to a decree, precept, statute, commandment, ordinance, word, or promise. The Psalmist seeks to persuade the readers or listeners to lead their lives in a particular way, or walk a particular path, with a spiritual buoyancy; finding the conduct that will lead to living in the 'right way'.

None of these verses contain specific injunctions invoking the Ten Commandments, the laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Rather, 'torah' is presented as a way of life that brings one closer to God. The Psalmist makes a number of petitions: 'teach', 'give me understanding', 'lead me', 'turn my heart', etc. The word 'fear' (v.38) appears many times in the Bible and some people have a problem with it. Does it mean we are frightened or intimidated by God? Or does it mean we hold God in awe and wonder? Or, does it mean simply that we should treat God with utmost seriousness? Fear therefore is about attentiveness towards God. As Proverb 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

So what wisdom and instruction should we seek to deal with the climate emergency? Clearly, we need to consume less and choose more low-carbon alternatives. If we eat less meat and consume more plants, this should lead us to a healthier lifestyle. Giving up flying is a bold decision but rectifies the gap between our values and actions. Redemptive actions can get the attention of family and friends, yet, ultimately, can have a virulent effect in our communities. We need a new acrostic: simple to understand, easy to follow.

Our God is not a God of arbitrary rules and regulations. God gave the Israelites a means for living as God's people, not to restrict them, but to free them to be the people of God. We too are looking for a fresh start, freed from the bondage of a consumerist lifestyle of vain imaginings in a shop window or digital screen. We too need to implore God to teach, give,

lead, and turn us in subtle ways so that we can become faithful servants, creative collaborators with God and each other, if we are to avoid the 'disgrace' that we dread.

Richard Murray is a lay reader in the Scottish Episcopal Church

Romans 13:8-14

Urgency is no reason to set aside justice: quite the contrary.

In verse 8, Paul continues his theme from verse 7 of paying your dues, which itself moves from debts of money to debts of virtue (respect and honour). Verse 8 repeats but deepens this same structure, with love being the ultimate (and only) debt to remain. It may be that Paul has in mind the encouragement of the Lord's Prayer to forgive debts. Any money-based economy is built on debt; perhaps Paul is arguing for a changed basis for our life together, where love is the top priority and all else is built on that love for others. Verses 8-10 recall Jesus in Luke 18:18ff, where He uses the first three of these commandments, in the same order, and then goes on to tell the rich ruler to sell all his possessions and give to the poor. Time and again, the bible writers insist on applying faith to finance.

These verses also recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40, in which Jesus sums up the law and the prophets in two commandments to love: loving God and loving neighbour. Jesus there says that all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments and here Paul says that love for neighbour fulfils the law. Neither Paul nor Jesus seem to argue for replacing the law's specific commandments with an alternative ethic of love. Rather, love is the rationale for the law, whose commandments show how love can be expressed, not just for a few neighbours but for all, including justice and care for the poorest, for animals and even for the land, addressing life from every angle, including the sabbatical commands concerning debt and the structure of the economy (e.g. Leviticus 25). That is why love is the fulfilment of the law.

Verses 11-14 inject a sense of urgency. Paul has not written this letter for endless discussion. It's a call to action now: to live the life of Jesus today. It's a call to live out our new lives in Christ as if His day had already dawned. Verses 12 and 13 have this sense of living as if in daylight while the night has not yet passed, letting our lives now be shaped by our hope in the world to come. There are echoes here of 8:9-17, where the Spirit gives us, now, the life of the resurrection as children of God and joint heirs with Christ of the glory that is to come. Verse 14 may help us understand how we can do this. The instruction to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' is similar to that in Galatians 3:27, where baptism clothes us with Christ. Paul's language in these verses may indicate a daily spiritual practice of clothing

oneself with Christ and His light. Surely the alternative of gratifying the desires of the flesh (v.14), including holding onto grudges and debts, is how we end up in a climate and environmental crisis.

Rev Alex Mabbs is a URC Minister Brighthelm Centre, deeply involved, for many years, with environmental spirituality & issues.

[Matthew 18:15-20](#)

There are times when the Bible gets approached as an instruction book: we find the bit we want, the verses that resonate with our prejudice or political aims, and with a triumphant “Aha!” feel vindicated. The need for a more nuanced approach is well-known, including a) allowing for the development of understanding within the Bible; b) seeing verses in the wider context of revelation in the whole Bible; c) alertness to the context when a text was written and d) allowing the Spirit to speak through the Bible into our own contexts.

As I look at this passage following these tracks, a warning light is flashing... I write this sitting alone (in lockdown)... This passage itself says that true wisdom comes in the gathered community, and discernment comes with the presence of Christ where two or more are together. It is then that the community can discern what is destructive or creative; the latter discernment leading into their prayer and other actions.

This passage is written from the early Church, a community sometimes having to deal with wrongdoers. Expelling someone as “a Gentile or a tax collector” echoes the Jewish culture of those times. After all these are the marginalised people whom Jesus had chosen to move among. We see in Acts and the Epistles how the early Church had difficulties reconciling their Judaism with the experience that the Spirit was also given to all people.

In this text the goal is to restore the wrongdoer to the community, to restore relationship. The wrongdoing is not specified as having been done to the person identifying the need for correction. This might be the case, or the harm might have been done to the community or its resources; its ability to sustain itself; or to be missionary disciples.

In our times, we have been forced to a new and wonderfully enriched view of our own core relationships: we are a part of a glorious yet vulnerable Earth, a gift to all people. So much of the current wrongdoing causes harm to the poor, to future generations, to the Earth’s ability to sustain healthy life and to its inherent preciousness. The wrongdoers are often not individuals, but international corporations and global economic structures. Where is the forum that can hold these to account? The UN and International Criminal Court are

undermined and attacked by isolationist, self-seeking powers. Can we challenge governments so that these organisations are reinvigorated, given effective power, and protected? We should also hold corporations to account, including by morally responsible investment, demanding that corporations repair the damage they cause. Such action is vital, but not enough.

This passage might prompt us to reassess our own relationships, including those with Earth. It invites us to join together in a commitment to pray for and with creation; to live more simply, and to discern how we can advocate and act to protect our common home [2].

References: John McKenzie, Jerome Biblical Commentary 43:128; The “Laudato Si” pledge, <http://livelaudatosi.org/>

Mike Mineter is a Roman Catholic, a member of the Iona Community; passionate about connecting with wilderness, as a grounded sea kayaker during Covid-19 lockdown he has been giving overdue attention to his garden. He works as an expert in computing for climate research at the University of Edinburgh.

Sermon ideas

1. As we begin this year’s Creation Time/Season of Creation, turning in faith to the various readings, we discover how love, forgiveness and faithfulness are utterly prominent in the calling of humanity to be partners with the rest of Creation, the fellow participants in God’s Covenant. We don’t need to dig for ‘green references’ in a Bible immersed in the life and the care of the Earth, “in which Christ became incarnate” (Iona Community Communion service).

Seasons have given us regularity, though seasons, even when reflected in ceremony, are not confined to dates in a diary. The disruption, caused by migration, to the growing and harvesting seasons prompts a greater respect for the fragility of everything we might have taken for granted – our traditional interpretation of the Scriptures included – along with the eternity of the rocks and the seas.

In Exodus 12, regulations clearly designed for the long haul are nonetheless clearly designed to mitigate against complacency: the tradition is observed by the trappings of urgency, rather than relaxed reassurance; a very valuable learning point for our day and age.

Whilst we always learn from the Scriptures, this needs to include the freedom to be outraged by the gleeful unforgiveness of Psalm 149, even when “the poor are adorned with victory”. Under no circumstance should followers of Christ feel an obligation to hatred, ‘because it says so in the Bible’.

The love of the ‘Law’ in Psalm 119 needs also to be taken carefully. ‘Torah’ is the moral will of God, and thus a reminder (2 Corinthians 3) that ‘the letter kills, the Spirit gives life’ is not inconsistent with a thoughtful and discerning approach, even to the most revered of texts. Indeed, this is the way they are best honoured, rather than with a crass, blind following. In Romans 13, “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

A thread of responsibility runs through the passages, but not the responsibility of rulers undergirded by coercive power. For Ezekiel, the predicament of the prophet is that without power or authority, they nonetheless bear responsibility for speaking out and warning their fellow citizens of danger.

That survival and rehabilitation is more important to God than following through the results of self-destructive decisions, is a valuable message.

Then, finally, in the Gospel ‘manual for church order’ of Matthew 18, we are shown the value of responsible witnesses, as well as that of seeking to avoid the escalation of divisive situations.

Climate science offers a **testimony** which we can take note of or ignore. There’s also a sting in the tail for the complacent here, in the instruction to treat offenders “as a Gentile and a tax-collector” – that is, as people in particular need of support in changing their mind and ways. The aim is always reconciliation, not exclusion.

Globally, we don’t have anywhere else to go; nowhere to send our offenders away to... And might we be these offenders?

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

2. We may need to be aware of the centrality of sacrificial meals in the culture from which the Bible arose, which made sacrifice so central to Jewish and Christian memorial imagery. Of course, cultural dissonance makes this controversial for many people.

Where and how are God's people and God's creation enslaved today? Who is Pharaoh? What 'plagues' people and environments? And what might we learn from the experience of this year? Keep an eye on the news. What are the dangers and uncertainties we face? How can we gird up our individual and community loins and start on a journey of liberation? How do we leave our old identity (gung-ho, wasteful exploiters of the planet, obsessed with GDP) and prepare in these liminal times for a new identity as thoughtful, sustainable Earth citizens attuned to the needs of all God's creation? How do we learn, in the way that Pharaoh tried not to?

Concentrating on a sense of the unjust entrapment of peoples and marine and land animal life can lead us to find examples of disempowered, vulnerable populations and places very much at risk of the plague of floods, fires and natural disasters (which the press routinely describes as being of 'Biblical proportions'). You could ask your congregation what are the plagues they see in the world and environment around them: overconsumption and waste; plastic and pollution; homelessness and inequality; mental illness and addiction?

We are people of Easter hope, who stand ready to be delivered. Ready to start on Day One of a New Year, and ready to commit to changes in how we live. How can we work alongside God to create a community of redemption among us? What are do-able small changes for us as we set off from this church service on our journey? Offer some examples of how we can recycle more, reuse more, reduce our individual and church carbon footprint. Remember, though that these are encouragements, rather than 'badges of office'. Every Sunday we remember God's love for all Creation, God's grace in redeeming us, God's gift of a new start.

Patsy Thomson is Warden of Lay Readers for Moray, Ross & Caithness Diocese of the Scottish Episcopal Church

3. The climate crisis is one of the starkest threats we have ever faced as a global community. The warning signs have been increasing for decades, while the science and the stories of those on the frontline of environmental change have been getting louder and clearer by the month. Reading Ezekiel 33:7-11 in this light invites us to consider how we hear and respond to this collective threat.

From the different perspectives the passage offers us, we can hear different messages. Firstly, the role of the prophet: It is not the prophet's job to shape how people respond. In fact, as we know from later in the passage, this is the work of God, who offers partnership in renewal and response. But the prophet has a responsibility to share the call of danger with the people, that they might hear and realise their own place within it.

As the Church, a global body with brothers and sisters around the world acutely feeling the impact of the climate crisis, what is our role in sharing this message? If we have begun to highlight this issue – are we doing enough? The warning to Ezekiel from God is clear – this is a heavy responsibility. He must play his part in moving the people to change.

But he realises God's part also – to offer mercy. As the Church speaks out alongside the other prophets of our time warning us of the dangers of the climate crisis, how can we make sure this message of mercy is heard too?

Next, we step into the shoes of the people of Israel, hearing the warning of the prophet. The prophet has stood watch, and has heard from God the warnings of danger for the community.

Who are our prophets today? From whom have we heard the warnings of the climate crisis? It might be communities in the global south, on the frontline of the climate crisis and feeling its effects acutely. Where has their vulnerability to disaster been a warning that our global community was at risk? Might it be activists, who have been campaigning on this issue for years? New voices such as Greta Thunberg's might have broken through the noise, but have we heard what they have to say?

Or is Creation itself the prophetic voice we need to hear? Should we be listening to the pain of wildfires, flooding, tsunamis and earthquakes?

The passage not only calls us to hear these prophets, but to respond. The cry of the people of Israel is a collective one. It suggests that the danger these prophets warn of is one in which we are all complicit. We waste away because of our transgressions and sins. Looking at the climate crisis, how is this a call to realise and lament our own part in this threat to Creation?

However, the passage does not leave us here. God responds to the cries of Israel with mercy. God expresses no delight in punishing those who do not respond to their own guilt – God does not offer 'dead-end' solutions. Instead, God is more interested in repentance and renewal. Through the prophetic warning and realisation of danger, God offers an invitation for change. How might we take this up today, in the light of the climate crisis?

Hannah Brown, Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer for the Joint Public Issues Team.

Prayers

Call to worship

The Creator of the Universe calls us to leave the darkness behind and live in the light.
Our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again, greets us this day.
The One who danced at Creation's birth calls us now into their presence.
So come, let us worship.

Prayers of approach, confession and pardon

O God,
You adorn the poor
binding rulers in chains
and allowing the people to rejoice.
Rise up, O God, anew,
adorn Your creation,
bind all that seeks to destroy it,
that we may not perish, but live.

O God,
often it seems we have to eat bitter herbs
as the Angel of Death has not passed over us;
we grieve those who have died from Covid-19,
lives lost from all over our land,
old and young, fit and frail,
care-worker and bus driver, nurse and doctor.

As we grieve we have to accept
our complicity,
our failure to plan,
our failure to learn the lessons,
our failure to care for our world,
and our failure to treat nature and animal life with respect.

Forgive us, good Lord,
and help us to turn our sorrow into action,
our failure into change,
our guilt into grace.

pause

God, the source of all mercy,
has sent the Holy Spirit amongst us
for the forgiveness of sins,
the equipping of the saints
and the fine tuning of our hearts.

Know that you are forgiven,
know too that you, with all of humanity,
need to use the grace of forgiveness
to be an energy of change
Amen

Prayer of illumination

Sometimes, O God,
Your Word is hard for us.
Sometimes, O God,
we don't want to hear You.

Sometimes, O God,
we'd rather sing our nice hymns,
pray our comforting prayers,
and turn away from what You require.

Send Your Holy Spirit,
that we may turn to You,
in the Word read and proclaimed,
that we may listen, understand, change and obey.
Amen

Blessing

May the One who adorns the poor,
binds the rulers,
and causes the people to rejoice,
adorn you with love,
bind all that seeks evil,
and give you cause to rejoice.

And the blessing of Almighty God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

be with you,
and all whom you love,
now and ever more
Amen

or

...and the blessing of Almighty God,
the Three-in-One
be with you,
and all whom you love,
now and ever more
Amen

Rev'd Andy Braunston is a URC minister, working with a group pastorate in the south of Glasgow. He co-ordinates the online 'Daily Devotions' for the United Reformed Church, a project that grew hugely in scope during the 'lockdown' crisis this year.

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

Passed Over – [Matthew 18:15-20](#)

Have you or someone you know ever been ‘passed over for a promotion’? It is an expression that has come to us from the USA, but its meaning is clear enough: those times when in the workplace you experience someone else taking a step upward on the promotion ladder while you remain on the rung below. Passed over. Left behind.

Being passed over has negative connotations, but not in the story from Exodus. In this story, you *want* to be passed over. In fact you will go to extraordinary lengths to be passed over: smearing the blood of a perfect one-year-old sheep or goat on the doorframe of your home. The alternative for your family doesn’t bear thinking about.

We begin a theme based around different aspects of ‘community’ in this Sunday’s service. Over the coming weeks the many different facets of that theme will be explored. This Sunday, however, marks the start of a journey. Here is the story that marks the pivotal moment when a community decides to leave all that it knows behind and seeks a new home. The cost is great for them and for those who are left behind.

This story of the Passover of God, the Pesach in Hebrew, has been kept alive for generation after generation as it is retold in Jewish homes during the festival and holiday associated with Pesach. Borrowing from those traditions for this service would be entirely appropriate – particularly the custom of a child asking questions about what is going on. This is a story that needs to be handled with sensitivity for there is no mistaking the horrifying side of the

story. Within the Jewish tradition, the sorrow and grief that surrounds this story is made clear in the choice of foods eaten during the feast: bitter herbs are a part of the feast in memory of the sadness of these events.

Within the story, the Passover marks the culmination of an ongoing struggle between God, through Moses and Aaron, and the Pharaoh over the Hebrew people. The cost of freedom from bondage and slavery is explored with graphic detail. Within the context of Israelite history, where the consecration of the firstborn was practised and human firstborns were redeemed by sacrifice (as described later in chapter 13), then the added importance of this story to the identity of the Hebrew people as a community. Their freedom was bought through the payment of a heart-wrenching sacrifice by the Egyptians.

The animated film, *Prince of Egypt*, handles the pass over scene particularly well and could be used in a worship or study context.

What is strikingly different about the instructions for this Passover meal, when compared to what we do today when we share a meal with each other in community, is that we take people's coats from them, perhaps even remove shoes, sit and get comfortable to share time together. Not so for the Passover feast: here you are to keep your coat on, ensure sandals are on and walking stick is to hand. The meal is to be eaten in haste.

If it sounds like the drive-thru at your nearby McDonald's then that is not far from the truth. This is a meal that marks the start of a journey. The Hebrews are not going to be settled for a long time, they are a people on the move.

How much have we forgotten that the church is also a people on the move? Have we settled and become so comfortable that the thought of moving away from all that we know is too costly to contemplate? What does it mean to be a community on the move? How does your church respond to the changing needs within the community around it?

Retelling for Young People

Listen to a story
of many years ago
of a Man we know as Moses
who said: "Let my People go!"

Pharaoh was the king
who always shouted “No!
Never, never, never
will I let your people go!”

So Moses told the Hebrews
to cook a meal of lamb
and eat it with their coats on
and leave soon as they can.
God gave Moses a message
(This sounds rather queasy)
to paint all of their doorpost
with blood—it should be easy

“For something bad will happen,”
said God, “if you’re not mine.
The blood will keep you safe
for that will be a sign.”

So after food was eaten
their coats and sandals on
Moses said, “Let’s go!”
And soon the Hebrews were gone.

Activities

Gathering activity

Ask people to turn to a few folk sitting near them and for a few moments discuss what happens when their families or friends get together. Where? When? Who? Food? Use these discussions as introduction to the setting of Passover.

In groups invite people to create a menu for a special occasion. Suggest a time such as Easter and Christmas and then move on to more unusual times such as Harvest or in memory of someone.

These activities help introduce the idea of how we remember and celebrate important times.

Packing to Go

Sit in a circle. Begin by saying that you are going on a journey and in your case you are going to pack... then suggest something beginning with the letter 'A'. The next person begins the same: I am going on a journey and I am going to pack... then they have to remember the previous item and add one beginning with 'B' and so on round the circle using the whole alphabet. This introduces the idea of going on a journey and starts the creative process of thinking about what you take with you.

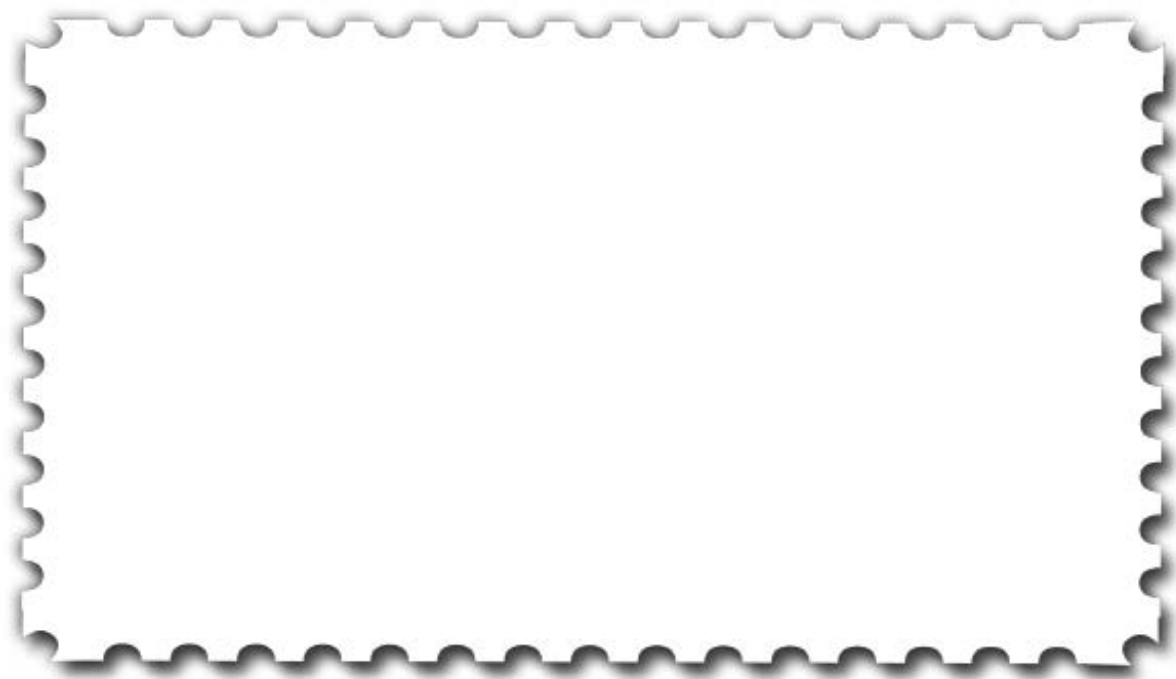
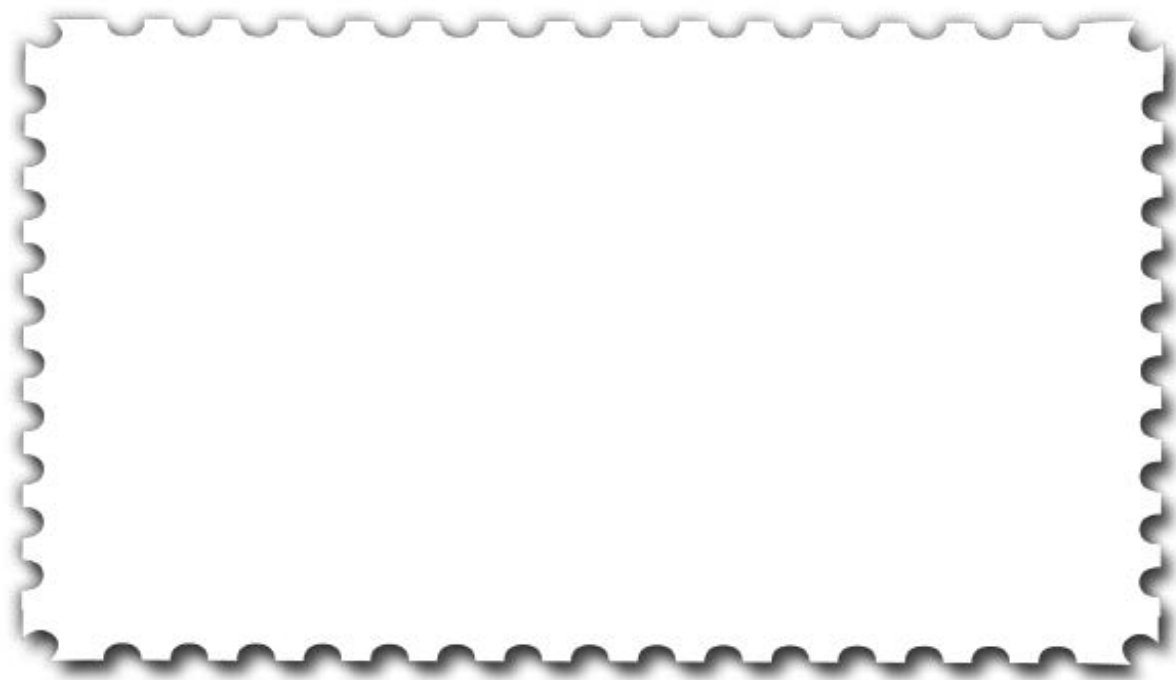
Stamp Collector – *You will need: card (pre-prepared with blank stamp template), colouring pencils or pens.*

This is an activity that can be picked up any week.

Design 'stamps' (or luggage labels) for throughout the season. Use a template of a perforated stamp and invite people to draw or symbolise the image from the story.

Two template postage stamps ready for photocopying can be found on the next page.

blank stamp template



74 spill the beans

Reflection

May we never sit down again, O God;
may we never coory in
and settle down again, O God,
for you are on the move
and we think we'd like to come with you.

God, deliverer of justice,
Almighty Redeemer of the bound up,
Creator who charges heaven
with freedom.

Are we the oppressed or oppressor?

Forgive us, forgiving God,
for we are both.

For we have conditioned ourselves to live in the contradiction
of faith and world,
in the tension between our lifestyle
and your reign.

We are caught up in patterns
of being oppressor and oppressed;
caught in a system that puts down others;
a way of living in the world
that we cannot escape from,
yet hurts others and ourselves.

And we turn aside from it,
justify it,
count ourselves exceptions,
trapping ourselves further,
caught up not knowing,
just living.

Free us, O freedom giver,
deliver us,
by opening eyes,

listening to you,
living your way,
paying life service
rather than lip service
to your realm.

For you never settle down,
you are always on the way
to a cross and to life,
to freedom and a wilderness,
to a tomb and resurrection.

May we come with you,
O God of hard choices,
for real freedom is the hardest choice.
May we journey with you
so we may be called your people?
So be it.
Amen.

Prayers

Call to worship

Detail – it's all in the detail.
Sometimes we can get away with being a bit airy fairy
but, other times, we have to stick to the rules,
go by the book
obey instructions.

Sometimes it's just too important for us to mess up.
Sometimes we need to follow through on our commitment
stop playing the game
and go with the detail.

All-Age Prayer

Living God
here is a big story for us
of a long ago time
when you freed people who were slaves

and called them your own people.

You seem to want to change things:
to move from what hurts
to what heals,
from what traps
to what gives us freedom.

Help us live like that too:
moving from dislike to love.
That's the way you do things,
that's the way you change the world,
that's the way you ask us to live.

And we can make our own big story
working with you
to help everyone
live fully, freely, fairly together.

Hear us as we pray together. Amen

Closing prayer

From whatever binds us,
from that which holds us back,
from the fear of change that traps us,
release us now to go in faith,
to step forward with your grace,
and to live the gospel of love,
in our community and world.
Walk with us now and always.

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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.

- “Where two or three” ([https://evensong.ca/wp-content/uploads/where two or three are gathered.pdf](https://evensong.ca/wp-content/uploads/where-two-or-three-are-gathered.pdf) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26xik5R19j0>) – A simple round that could be used as a call to worship
- CH4 106 – “Bring to the Lord a glad new song” – This setting of the psalm sets our praise not just in a building but “beneath the dome of heaven”, with all living things joining in
- CH4 244 – “Where are the voices for the earth?” – Responding to the command in the psalm to “sing a new song to the Lord”, this song asks us to consider what that new song should look like in the context of the climate crisis
- CH4 545 – “Lord, teach us how to pray aright” – Links to the Matthew passage
- CH4 621 – “Spirit of Jesus, if I love my neighbour” – A response to the Romans passage exploring what it means to love your neighbour
- CH4 653, 778, 790 – “Lamb of God,” – The Exodus passage is the story of the Passover so you may wish to use an Agnus Dei. All three of these are very singable by congregations
- CH4 771 – “If you believe and I believe” – An upbeat sending song, which picks up Matthew 18:19. You could change the final words to “and set creation free”
- CH4 773 – “Jesu, tawa pano (Jesus, we are here)” – Another possible gathering song which could be adapted into three verses of “Maker/Jesus/Spirit, we are here”, to fit Creation Time
- “Go down Moses” (Spiritual) – Available online, e.g. [https://hymnary.org/text/when israel was in egypt's land](https://hymnary.org/text/when-israel-was-in-egypts-land) – Moses is asking Pharaoh to “Let my people go”
- “Hear the call of the kingdom” – (<https://www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/hear-the-call-of-the-kingdom/>) – A modern hymn with a gospel feel about sharing the love of God

- A new hymn-poem for Climate Sunday – “Now Christ lives here as he promised” (Rev David Coleman) – The promise of Jesus to prepare a place where His friends can be with Him (John 14:3) need not be taken by default as being ‘post-mortem’: Christ lives in the midst of community, engaged in friendship and partnership with Creation.

Festivals and special days, such as Climate Sunday, coming at the start of this year’s Creation Time, rightly help to deepen our faith and commitment. Can be sung to the tune ‘Courage, brother, do not stumble’ [CH4 513], or one with the metre 87 87 D, e.g., Blaenwern, Abbot’s Leigh, Beach Spring, Converse – [**NB** the potential need to repeat the penultimate line.] Choose a tune which really carries your congregation.

Now Christ lives here as he promised,
having once prepared the place:
Now we live as kingdom people
shaped, re-shaped at frightening pace;
Now, whilst still we live and struggle
Justice and Earth’s voice speak loud
Now immersed in this day’s trouble
Humble friends **[3x]**
of Christ are proud!

Now the scriptures find their meaning:
told, re-told, refined by toil.
Choking air may yet be fragrant;
Fertile our degraded soil
Now the teaching we have sidestepped:
Love for all we can’t evade:
Grace, forgiveness sets us free, in
joy to live **[3x]**
as Jesus prayed.

Now and for our lives remaining;
Laurels offer feeble rest.
Times and seasons shape commitment
By immediacy blessed.
Be not tempted by ‘Good Old Days’
Now, the days of Christ are best
Christ incarnate in Earth’s family
Flesh and blood, **[3x]**
God, manifest.

Yeast in dough and shining city
Salt for Earth and light for all
Not as domineering tyrants
but as friends for this long-haul!
Every day, the chance to follow
Not one step we walk in vain;
Green our God is, sending Spirit:
energy **[3x]**
from buried grain.

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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