

SEASON OF CREATION : CREATION TIME: CREATIONTIDE



Living Water
Season of Creation 2026

Immersion in Living Water
EZEKIEL 47:9, 12

These **Revised Common Lectionary** resources Notes , Worship material, sermon suggestions and music suggestions are offered through [EcoCongregation Scotland](http://EcoCongregationScotland.org), as participation in the global churches observance of the Season, from 1st September to 4th October, and Sundays close or included.

Any questions, or for help with use: chaplain@ecocongregationscotland.org

WEEK 1 - New And Old

A new lectionary is offered from 2026 for Week 1, to enable use to celebrate "Creation in Christ" . This follows several years of discussion, in the 'Assisi process', involving almost all of the world's 'families' of churches.

Material for the previous lectionary is also offered, for those who prefer to use it. **Bible texts are included, for ease of reference, in green.** Bookmarks (which allow you to jump to a different section) are **in red.**

WEEK 1: CREATION IN CHRIST

Overview

The Season begins with our first chance to engage with the fruit of painstaking and very ecumenical consultations: to provide, for the first time, dedicated readings to help us reflect on Christ in the context of God the Creative Trinity. These readings as a set have been chosen with utmost care, to work together . But in a local church situation, choices have to be made. A local church won't read all of them on a Sunday morning. Do you really need a long sermon after reading the whole of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**? Quite an event!

Some previous, attempts, commendably motivated by concern for gender justice - to be '*inclusive*' in speech of God as Creator have fallen at the fence of 'division of labour', casting the first person of the Trinity as "sole" Creator, as if Christ and the Spirit were not completely and collaboratively involved. Current discussions between churches are aiming at something much more 'inclusive' - especially of Christ. We can note that this was also

a concern of the Church of Scotland's Theological Forum in 2022 https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/93374/theological-forum.pdf

It's perhaps out of concern, also, that we're not celebrating some bland and theologically toothless ecological festival, but delighting, *specifically as Christians*, that when "the Earth brings forth" this is also **how** "God makes" [Genesis 1]. Loving Care for Creation and worship of God are more than merely 'compatible'. Creation is God's doing, so mission, too is always, also, of the Earth. We're invited in this selection to join our song to the universal -and therefore inherently diverse - praise of every living fellow creature [in **Psalm 148**]. We're reminded, as too in Paul's craftily contextual and respectful outreach to the people of Athens [**Acts 17**] of the prophetic, and indeed the missional voice of the Earth, again through variety, diversity and concern for God's justice. Finally, with the majestic opening of John's Gospel, so well-fitted to be the opening words of the Season as a whole "All things came into being through [Christ], and without [Christ] not one thing came into being.

Rev Dr Alex Clare-Young, Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT - URC, Methodist, Baptist) contributes a reflection, mostly on Genesis 2.

Bookmarked links:

Worship material/prayers

[Genesis 1:1-2:3](#)

[Genesis 2:4-25](#)

[Psalm 148:1-14](#)

[Acts 17:22a, 24-28](#)

[John 1:1-5](#)

[Sermon suggestion.](#)

[Music Suggestions](#)

NOTES FOR PREVIOUS LECTIONARY

[Exodus 12:1-14](#)

[Psalm 149](#)

[Ezekiel 33:7-11](#)

[Psalm 119:33-40](#)

[Romans 13:8-14](#)

[Matthew 18:15-20](#)

[Worship material for previous](#)

EXTRA : Readings Taster HERE - 800 word PDF to give a flavour of the 1800 words of the 'Three Beginnings' of Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and John 1

Genesis 1:1-2:3

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.



ECS STAFF: Genesis 1:1-2:3

This is such a majestic passage, which even in our sometimes watered-down translations demands to be an event in itself rather than "just a reading". That 'Biodiversity is the

wisdom of God' (motto of the RZSS) should be inescapable from the meticulously inclusive choruses.

The word “**every**” occurs a startling **23** times! Whether we like it or not, ways this ‘hymn’ has been read have led both to wonder, faith and justice, as well as the environmental devastation that results when the multi-layered giving of human authority over fellow creatures (*which we note, is relativised in the repetitively creation-inclusive covenant of Genesis 9*) has been taken as a mandate for exploitative tyranny. The other ‘**rulers**’ set in place - the Sun for the Day and the Moon for the night, are, we note, to be sources of light and life for the whole created/related Earth. No ‘ruler’ of the ancient world could expect to stay ‘in post’ without due care and partnership with ‘subjects’ to whom they were responsible, and whose flourishing was the final criterion of their authority. The Old Testament supplies hundreds of pages of evidence why ‘**domination**’ is everything other than the will of God. Don’t be tempted to replace ‘dominion’ with the miserably unambitious, merely janitorial ‘stewardship’, which **isn’t** offered in any current English translation. [check **everything** offered here <https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-26.htm>]

Firstly, this fails to convey the majesty of our human calling to express, in our loving and just God’s image and likeness; secondly the responsibility is too narrowly to God alone, rather than to neighbours of whatever species; thirdly, in a Season which values the involvement of Christ, his model of ‘rule’ is to offer humble service to all.[Matthew 20:28 cf Mark 10:45]. Christ is the exemplary fulfilment - and often the necessary correction - of “dominion”. Christ who lived and taught in constant relationship with nature, filled with affection and awe.

Alongside diversity and inclusivity, the passage dramatically expresses how God involves and devolves the ‘creating’ to Creation **without ceasing to be ‘causing’** the emergence of life in relationship to life. That the co-creative sea or land brings forth life is the same, in the next breath as how “God made”.

Thus this amazing reading its a good opportunity to deal with any deeply damaging fears that love, awe and attention to Creation might in any sense detract from worship of God.

Your heart shouldn’t need me to point out the opposite is true. Awe at a mountain, delight in a puffin, as well as wonder, and spiritual ‘fear’ at the fiercer and more terrifying aspects of how the world is made; these are rich dimensions of our worship of God, who cannot be loved without our love for our neighbour. Whose creative intention is that all God makes be ‘very good’. And who blesses all Creation with the pinnacle of God’s work, the Sabbath, which allows for the recuperative cycles of what we must not treat as a single-use planet.

However you present this reading, don’t forget to attend both to delight and wonder. And do not look down on the ancient but objective eye-witness description of the ‘dome’ of the sky. That’s how it still looks to you, here on Earth, every night.

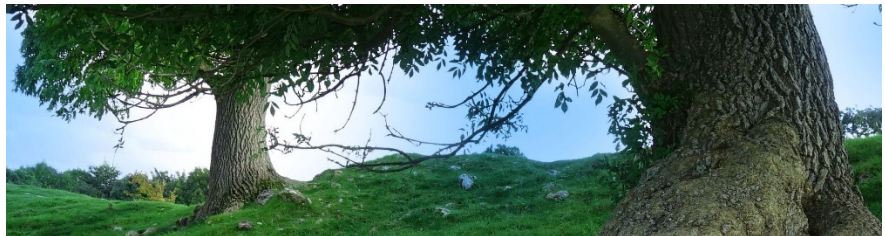
[BACK TO TOP](#)**Genesis 2:4-25** These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no vegetation of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground, but a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air and to every animal of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.



Video Extra HERE: A pastoral, environmental reading of Genesis 2:18-22

Genesis 2:4-25: Rev Dr Alex Clare-Young, Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT - URC, Methodist, Baptist)

Bone of My Bone, Dust of My Dust

When we read Genesis 2, we are tempted to read it through the lens of centuries of argument - about gender, about hierarchy, about who came first and what that means. But if we slow down and listen to the text on its own terms, something different emerges. Something older, and more urgent.

The word translated "man" in most of our Bibles is *ha'adam* - the earth creature, the one formed from *ha'adamah*, the ground. Before there is any distinction of any kind, there is this: a creature - or maybe even a community of creatures - made of earth, breathing borrowed breath, held in intimate relationship with the soil from which they came. We are, at our most fundamental, creatures of the Earth - not lords thereof. The deep longing at the heart of this story is not for a particular kind of partner. It is for *belonging*. "It is not good," God says, "for the earth creature(s) to be alone." The first thing declared "not good" in all of scripture is isolation.

Disconnection. The rupture of relationship.

This is where sin begins - not with sex, not with gender, but with separation. Separation from one another. Separation from the God in whom, as Paul tells the Athenians, "we live and move and have our being." And separation from the living Earth that bore us and still holds us and groans for recognition, for urgency, for repair, for reconciliation. Psalm 148 will not let creation be merely backdrop. Sun and moon, fire and hail, mountains and cedars and creeping things - all of them are called to praise. All of them have a voice in the choir of the cosmos. And John's Gospel opens before any of this, reminding us that the Word through whom all things were made is also the Light no darkness can extinguish.

We gather in this Season of Creation as people who know, in our bones, that something is broken. The climate crisis, the extinction emergency, the poisoning of soil and sea and air - these are not accidents of bad luck. They are the fruit of that ancient rupture, writ large across the planet. We have acted as though we were separate from creation, free to use it without belonging to it.

But the readings will not leave us there. The Word still speaks. The Spirit still moves over the waters. And the Earth - patient, suffering, resilient - still cries out its praise.

We are called, this season, back into right relationship: with God, with one another, and with the community of creation to which we have always, already, belonged.

ECS STAFF: Genesis 2:4-25

In contradiction to some gloomier current environmentalisms, Genesis 2 asserts necessity and benefit, for the flourishing of the Earth, of the human contribution. This is what we're for, not what we do! Domination should not define us. In the watchword of the Peasants



revolt of 1381: 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?'

Recent studies of beneficial participation of humanity, over millennia, in the rich biodiversity even of the Amazon, give authority to this poetic presentation. The text also takes care, in naming actual rivers, not to be dismissed as irrelevantly abstract. Likewise, the recognition of how vital is the health of the top 10-20cm of soil for 95% of global human food production. Each cm of fertile topsoil can represent an inheritance of thousands of years of diverse life. A healthy handful contains more living organisms than the human population.

Dig down, also, into what English idioms obscure: the 'adam' (often under-translated 'man') is 'Earth' FOR the 'Earth'. We are the beloved "soil of Earth's soil"; and, in advance of our relatedness to each other - gender differences only emerge in humanity after this 'adam has been redefined by major surgery - the task of naming is that of establishing relationship, rather than mere neutral classification. It's misleading, despite the translations given, to use the word 'man' until the emergence of the 'partner'. 'Human' might be among several more appropriate choices. And for those who insist on discussions of gender, it's the **similarities** rather than differences (bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh) that make for the distinctive depth of human fellowship, let alone the clear equality of 'partnership.' It's from this perspective that the writer makes observations about their own culture's marriage customs, rather than prescribing them. We also note an awareness both of wildlife and those creatures, like cattle, which are observed to be living alongside humans. Domestication is not in question here, though the balance and the health of the whole 'garden' certainly is. Neither wildlife nor farmed animals are mutually exclusive, which is a neglected point, as we grasp later prophetic writings longing for harmony between wild predators [cf Isaiah 11:6]

And, of course, in this ideal world, all life is **vegetarian**.....

This observation may reasonably provoke discussion in a world in which consumption of factory-farmed animals has impacts at many levels. Firstly, the welfare of our -named -

fellow creatures is a reflection on the human dignity of the society they feed. It's fair, but an easy whinge, to decry the desecration of biodiverse forests, habitats and homelands, to provide sparse pasture for miserable cattle belching the methane (80X as potent as CO2 for global warming) before their 'product' is pollutingly transported to disrupt a responsible food economy elsewhere. Excessive and unreflective meat consumption has been noted by United Nations agencies as a globally distorting accompaniment of unjustly distributed wealth, though we've also experienced knee-jerk responses from those who leap to the false conclusion that this can only be an attack on responsible farming. An absurd article in a farming magazine described global warming as "an illusory threat". But farming, as responsible care and partnership with the fruitfulness of the Earth, can best express the aspirations raised in this text.

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Psalm 148:1-14

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heaven And you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, **for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.** Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! **Wild animals and all cattle**, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, **for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven; He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful; for the people of Israel who are close to him.** Praise the Lord!

ECS STAFF: Psalm 148:1-14

This breathlessly effusive psalm - affirming the glory of God as Creator in radical biodiversity and cultural variety, human and way beyond - can be, for us, an antidote to the over-spiritualised detachment of that part of Creation we might call 'heavens' or 'sky'. From blue whales to midges, God is praised, with good reason, in a choir to which we're invited, but in which we're - in this song, refreshingly - far from indispensable. The angels, as our fellow-creatures, sing alongside the insects: human distinctions of status are, if not set aside, set in perspective. The particularities of age and youth, male and female, are valued and named, rather than watered down. And the harmony is all the greater as a result.

Likewise the distinction between wild and domesticated animals. Is it a merely human distinction to set these in opposition to each other? Does this challenge the way we talk of "nature"? And what do our congregations make of the insistence, in conversation with Christians of the Pacific, that we are not "part of" Creation, but rather "we ARE the biodiversity we protect or destroy"

Without dispute or competition, it's God, not us, who calls the tune. That's the antidote, likewise to the ways in which a decidedly unbiblical mythology of human supremacism has crept into church consideration of Creation.

This psalm, by contrast, refuses to isolate any interactive, interwoven aspect of the whole of what God has made, albeit with an understandable concentration on the life of what we recognise as this planet.

God's "glory" beams from "above Earth and heaven/sky". And does so reassuringly for some theologians, and understandably for those astronauts who have described 'looking down on heaven' [cf also Psalm 113:3-5] as the Earth's enfolding garment, reminding us today not to disconnect sky and heaven: the disruption of the climate, of migrations, of the level, acidity and temperature of the oceans, as of every part of this radically inclusive choir of Creation, is therefore an insult and rebellion against the Creator; and a diminution of the praise God's due.

The Psalmist looks to the solidity and resilience of the 'natural' cycles and systems set up by God's intent. How much more blasphemous is it, if we knowingly carry on regardless with ways of life, - in particular the damage caused by fossil fuels - which directly challenge these "bounds, which cannot be passed".

The writer is to be commended for their inspired confidence that the cherished special relationship of their own people 'Israel' with God [Yaweh, 'The LORD'] finds its place, unthreatened, amidst all the other, many far greater marvels of the created order.

Given the origins of the insight that "God makes the world" in the recognition that Israel's God is the God of justice, scholars with a devotional agenda of locating Christ/Messiah in this process have highlighted the image of the 'horn', signifying the sort of royalty/ leadership which praises God in the pursuit of justice. It's to be hoped that this is the sort of leadership we would seek and vote for, whenever we have the opportunity.

But to be God's People clearly means finding our place and purpose as creatures amongst creatures, rather than a different sort of creation entirely.

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Acts 17:22a, 24-28

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all peoples to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we, too, are his offspring.'"

Illustration: Paul at the Areopagus: window in the former Greenock West URC

ECS STAFF: Acts 17:22a, 24-28

Behind Paul's dyed-in-the wool pharisaic hatred of devotional artwork encountered in Athens [Acts 17: 16]: is a dismay which we ought to share at 'actual' idolatry- understood as that profound self-deception which attributes to gold, silver, power and oil, the moral significance proper only to God

This is not - neutrally - 'piety focussed on other dimensions of God', which Paul's speech does allow for, but the abuse of 'religion' for injustice.

This passage is part of a longer (reconstructed) speech from Paul's turbulent second missionary journey [c.50-52 ad], which proclaims the complementarity of faith in Christ to our experiential reading of the 'signs in sky and soil' [cf Luke 21:25-26 and Joel 2:30-31]. The speech pioneers the mission strategy of 'apologetic': discovering how far we can lean over backwards to accommodate speech and thinking of our hearers, without truth and integrity collapsing in a heap on the floor.

It's possible, because God is already where we have not been, and may bring rewards for those of open mind, from the Maker of all things seen and unseen. Rewards: where we are ready to learn how our own limits, on God's identity and works, are themselves wont to descend into idolatry when we defend them as definitive.

Which is not to say that everything we offer to a 'foreign' culture will be wrong. Or everything learned from them will be right. It's a matter of prayerful discernment, like Paul repurposing the gifts of his pharisaic background, **whilst** also swallowing pride **whilst** trusting in God's love for those we might find it difficult to respect.

Through Paul's initiative, - respectful of local culture or through gritted teeth(?) - Paul makes connections which translators and preachers have been tempted to hide or weaken. This choice, in lections for 'Creation in Christ' encourages us to resist such 'greywashing' as creeps in with translators' insertion of "mortals" [v25] rather than letting "all" be even ambiguously inclusive of the more-than human.

For Paul, heading to the marketplace in Athens, sticking his neck out for "Christ crucified and risen", is like heading for the docks in Aberdeen, loudly preaching Just Transition as the end of fossil fuels. To be a **witness** - the original meaning of the word "**martyr**". Stick your neck out in an exposed place as Paul did, and **some** listen with hope and interest, whereas some **will** turn ugly. Previous chapters of Acts detail how brutally rough that could get.

When we oppose what oppresses, we can become targets.

We exist from day to day addicted to fossil fuels, increasingly to AI, as part of an economic system which brutally puts minority wealth before global welfare. Is it an encouragement that, like us, Paul has bought into so much? Yet still preaches effectively.



Yes, there **are** more martyrs to the love for God's Earth in the **Amazon** than in Aberdeen but with the recent combination of extreme politics, racial hatred and climate denial, even in Scotland, with violence under the surface, we have to be ready for anything.

PS: Paul talks of "judgement". I can't responsibly ignore that, but **must** rather repurpose it in terms of global crisis. Because, warning and ultimatum do make up much of the language of the New Testament. Consciousness of crisis wakes us up once more to timeless blessings of wariness and preparedness. And propels us to active prayer.

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John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

ECS STAFF: John 1:1-5

This powerful jewel of sophisticated Biblical poetry, might be worth reading several times, in differing versions which remind a congregation both of our struggles to unpack and interpret it, whilst nonetheless being inspired and uplifted by it.

Included as an option for all three years of the new First Sunday lectionary, the opening of John's Gospel definitively asserts Creation as the collaborative initiative of God whom Christianity comes to know as Trinity. Three coequal persons of the One Creator God. (Not 'the Boss, the junior and the pigeon'.) This very short reading might be deepened by addition of verse 14: "The Word became flesh, and lived among us", noting the inclusive choice of "flesh" rather than "human", as in the Creeds more than two centuries later.

'All things' (v3) has been more resilient than most scripture to pruning down to human scale. Assertively: "without [theWord] not one thing came into being."

Of course there's an echo of Genesis 1:1. The "Word?" Don't make too much of traditional 'commentary references' to Word/Logos in classical philosophy, though this may have had an initial mission bonus, as also the Hebrew 'Dabhar' conveying the creative

energy of God. Contemporary Disciplines such as quantum physics may offer unlikely reminders that “bringing into being” is not limited to one distantly past event, but continues, through the cycles of the Earth, with each new day. Expect a diverse congregation to see other valid parallels. Christians in cultures with differing Creation stories find their faith enriched by such connections. But the Word, whom we meet as Jesus, without being threatened by the need of contradicting such things, is -literally- much more **person-al**, relational.

In Season of Creation, the fresh missionary/teaching opportunity open to us, is to focus on God’s intentional closeness, specifically in Christ, to concrete realities of life, therefore including our life. Because the balance of life - “that has come into being in him” - is severely threatened, this world needs ‘his’ help as never before. Yes, with special focus on guidance for humans as creatures amongst creatures. As a favoured or adorned “cloodie tree” remains in, and benefits from the surrounding forest, we do not set aside our interwovenness in Creation when we do mention humanity.

The ‘light’ does not **deny** the fact of darkness. This gives realistic hope for those in trying times. The light (present tense) continues to shine through successive darknesses we encounter. Can we read the past tense of the final words as “the darkness - despite repeated efforts - has never overcome the light, or ‘got’ (King James ‘comprehended’) what the light is about”? Current politics also opens up the paradox, that what one party claims as their ‘selling point’, another, with completely differing values, may describe as appalling.

‘Darkness’ too, has to be encountered as personal, crafty, “the Father of Lies” (John 8:44) of whom, in a world full of fake news and websites of climate denial, as of racial and ‘Christian’-nationalist slogans, those who trust in the “grace and truth” (John 1:14) need to be acutely wary.

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(image: Photoshop composite from picture taken at COP26 and public domain image of Jane Austen)

SERMON SUGGESTION

A truth universally acknowledged....

******Note:** This suggestion is based on the Three 'Beginnings' in Genesis 2, Genesis 2 and John 1. Because to read all three [1800+ words] would take up too much of a service, in the practicalities of worship, discerning choices have to be made: perhaps key extracts of several texts, to highlight the intent of the 'Lectionary folks' that these be overtly complementary. Like Creation's self, one connected and interactive whole.*

*We offer **HERE** a suggested set of "Selected verses" - 820 words rather than 1800, but make sure the congregation knows these **are** extracts.*

The Opening Words of Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' are amongst the most wittily inspired in English literature; written with awareness of the peculiar magic of **starting points**, and of the order we find things in.

Today we meet all that head-on

In more conservative moments, we **might** place faith in phrases like "**back to basics**", with the bizarre implication that subsequent reflection, adaptation - *and dare I say, evolution* - will be inferior, rather than valid as part of the whole.

Is John inferior to Genesis 1 and 2? And Is Christ as Creator inferior to the Father and Spirit? For centuries, the church says no.

And yet the power of inspiring good beginnings can be stolen by idolatries of power, money, oil, and national pride.

*Usurping that throne of "**truth universally acknowledged**" from which only Truth set free can topple them.*

*Despite all we've seen of droughts, floods, rising seas, melting ice: expressing the groaning of nature well beyond what's natural; and despite wonderful scriptural endorsements of God's love for a beautiful, diverse world, we remain vulnerable to the lies of billionaire media, with intimidating claims to **universal acknowledgement** of security, prosperity and employment; all at the cost of **everything** so vital to the writers of these three Beginnings.*

In John's Gospel, the Word expands the acknowledged truth of God's work of Creation by total personal immersion in flesh, blood, and Earth. The Word, who is God, puts themselves on the line for all things. Which is why the Word speaks to humanity, the carers for all things.

Readers *of* Jane Austen, are forced to re-think her **dubiously** universal acknowledgment that rich bachelors **must** be actively seeking a wife - because, in the course of her story, we discover both how this both is and is not the case.

These three “beginnings”, in Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and John 1, **happily** reach **us** through many layers of devotion, and interpretation.

Dig down into what English idioms obscure: that ‘Adam’ is ‘Earth’ FOR the ‘Earth’. We are the beloved “soil for Earth’s soil”.

Beneficial human involvement, over millennia, in the biodiversity of the Amazon, gives authority to this poetic presentation. Likewise, the recognition of how vital is the health of the top 20cm of soil for global food production.

In Genesis 1, the word “**every**” occurs a startling **23** times.

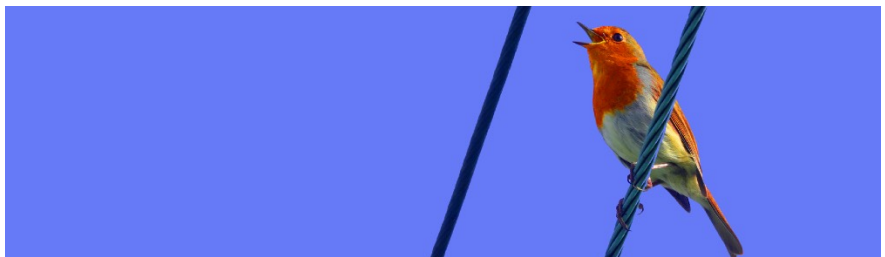
It should not be possible to read these three stories of the inclusive majesty of God as Creator, without also being struck by the prominence given to diversity and collaboration: by the inclusion, alongside all races, nations and cultures of humanity, of “all things” made, as John insists, through Christ.

Genesis 1 expresses how God involves and devolves the ‘creating’ to Creation whilst remaining the creator of life. That the co-creative sea or land “brings forth” life is, in the next breath, **exactly** how “God made”.

Awe at a mountain, delight in a puffin, as well as spiritual ‘fear’ at more terrifying aspects of Creation; these enable our worship of God, who cannot be loved without our love for our neighbour. Whose creative intention is: that all God makes be ‘very good’.

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WORSHIP MATERIAL

Call to worship: several options

OPTION 1: Gathering prayer: Alex Clare-Young

We come from the earth, shaped from soil, breathing borrowed breath. We come in the name of the Word through whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together.

We come in this season of harvest and heat, of church festivals and climate reports, of stubborn hope and stubborn grief.

Creator God - you who breathed life into the dust, who named every creature before we named a single one, who set the stars singing and the seas roaring with praise - gather us now. Gather us into right relationship: with you, with one another, with the earth that is our kin and our home.

Come, let us worship together.

OPTION 2

To begin

God makes

To make

God shares

To share

God calls

To call

God breathes

To life

the Word is flesh

OPTION 3

We are God's gift

when we serve and protect

We are God's people

when we listen and act

We are Christ's friends

in abundant variety

We are the Earth

for the good of the World!

Prayer of Approach

Sustaining Creator,

at work, from the beginning

for beauty and justice;

for variety and cycles of living

for compassion and fruitfulness;

Lovely God, you are worthy above all of our worship,

expressed in the journeying of our our lives.

Guide our feet, stepping lightly, to trampling

Touch our hearts with the knowledge of Creation

releasing the energy of healing change,
liberating our communities, our churches
with truth, courage, faith and cheerfulness
as friends of Christ, who spoke with trees, and seas
immersed in all that would not be
if you, our God,
had not spoken the Word.

Confession

Option 1: (Alex Clare-Young)

Repentance

Let us be honest before God and one another.

We confess that we have lived as if we were separate - separate from the Earth that feeds us, separate from the creatures who share it, separate from the communities near and far who bear the worst cost of our excess.

We have named creation "resource" and forgotten it is neighbour. We have sought dominion and lost relationship. We have looked away from burning forests, from flooding homes, from exhausted land, and told ourselves it is someone else's problem.

Forgive us, God of all Creation. Restore in us what is broken. Re-weave us into the web of belonging from which we were never truly free.

Assurance

Hear good news: God creates us out of Earth and returns us to it. Christ reconciles us. The Spirit breathes fresh air into and amongst us. Change is not only possible – it is inevitable. AMEN.

Option 2 Use para i) and your choice from ii, iii and iv

i) God who creates connection,
bringing beauty out of chaos;
setting bounds and balance;
delighting in diversity and mutual dependence
of all whose common home we share;

ii) Show us clearly
how we have isolated and ignored
scattered when we might have planted
broken the harmony we might have sought
and denied both the fact and the responsibility
when our choices have harmed the Creation we also are:

iii) Confront us with the bitter fruits of injustice
we have so eagerly tended
with our sour inheritance we have refused to sweeten

with drought, flood; lifeless topsoil
even as seas rise and boil,
extinctions way beyond what's natural
and the human poor suffer
beyond what we ourselves could bear

iv) In your powerful love
make it so brutally plain,
so we're appalled
at the callous complacency
and deadly denial
which are sustained as much by our silence as our support.

Repentance/Assurance of pardon

And then in love made new
forgive us, free us, surprise us with the liberty of forgiveness
to delight in every small step that remakes and reconnects
and re-loves, and reshapes
Ourselves as your creatures
for the Good of the Earth.

Option 2 (from the Creation-incusive Communion liturgy: see elsewhere in the Season Web-page

How long will the land mourn,
and the grass of every field wither?
For the wickedness of those who live there
the animals and birds are swept away
because people said: "God is blind to our ways!"

Enough!

Assurance of pardon.

Tell a story instead
of a ground that is holy!

Sing a song of wide welcome
for those who've messed up!

Paint a picture, forgiving:
to save from despair....

Friends...we are forgiven
before we have fixed things.
It's Jesus who says:
"do not fear tomorrow -
you're up to your eyes in today!" [Matt 6:25]
And Jesus who says:
"you're forgiven, you're free..." [e.g. Luke 7:48]

Silence

God: forgive!
Christ: remake!
Spirit:..... repurpose!

GLORIA - From Church of South India

Glory to God,
who has made a covenant
with all living creatures,
and has promised
never to forsake the Creation God loves:

[Lord's Prayer/Our Father here or later]

Thanksgiving / Gratitude**Option 1: Alex Clare-Young****Gratitude**

We give thanks, Creator God, for the stubborn beauty and ruggedness of the world
- for soil that still yields, for bees that still find flowers, for the rocks that bear us,
for the kindness of strangers and the courage of campaigners.

We give thanks for those who relate to the earth with love and with science and
with faith - for eco-congregations who refuse to look away, for farmers and
foresters and climate scientists, for the young people who march and the elders
who remember.

We give thanks that the Light still shines in the darkness, that the Word still speaks
in wind and water, that we are held, even now, in the One in whom we live and
move and have our being.

Thanks be to God.

Option 2

Dear God,
who speaks Christ,
who shares flesh,
who sends your Spirit, wilder than wind;

We delight!

We delight in the solidarity of sisters and brothers
siblings and elders, who grasp and respond
to the urgency of a just transition
from a humanity which harms to a people who protect

We delight in the puffins and butterflies

the bees and the birds
the sunrises, rainbows and stars.

We delight in good food
and the work constantly under way
to alleviate hunger and poor diets
under vines and fig-trees
in community orchards and public green spaces

Without embarrassment,
encourage our delight in the easy, green, pleasures
the low-hanging fruit which gets us moving.
(the litter-picks and forest prayers)

That we may delight in everything which builds us up
to be your light for the world
to bring hope to our neighbours
and the resilience and faith
for which we have cause to be grateful
in difficult days to come

Prayer for others / Intercession

Option 1: Alex Clare-Young

Prayers for people and the earth

We pray for a world in crisis and a church learning to respond.

We pray for communities on the frontlines of climate change - for those losing land to rising seas, for those whose harvests fail in drought, for those displaced by floods and fires they did nothing to cause. May our advocacy be as loud as our prayer.

We pray for our political leaders - for courage to act beyond the next election cycle, for wisdom to choose justice over short-term growth, for ears open to the cry of the earth and the cry of those with lived experience of poverty, which are so often one cry.

We pray for Eco Congregation Scotland and congregations like us - may our buildings, our budgets, and our voices reflect the values we profess. May we be communities of genuine belonging - belonging to this earth, belonging to each other, belonging to you.

We pray for the more-than-human world: for species on the edge, for rivers running low, for soils stripped bare. May we be part of their healing, not the continuation of their harm.

Hear our prayer.

Option 2: ECS Staff

Christ, who prayed for our unity,
[to the Father, in the Spirit]
pray with us now, for a divided world
creature from creature, people from people;
pray with us for the strength of all our voices calling out for change
to turn the tide of knowing, chosen harm; of denial
passed off so aggressively as wisdom

Pray with us now, for paths to true security and prosperity
-for peace with nature and among peoples
-for an end to the priority of weapons over aid
-for the Fossil-fuel non-proliferation movement,
with deep gratitude that it carries the endorsement of so many of our faith bodies

Pray with us now, for the creatures whose flourishing
was for your sign of God's blessing: birds and fish,
and the wilder beauty for whom the Holy Jubilee made provision
in praise of, in obedience to the God of 'new every morning'.

Christ, who prayed for our unity,
[to the Father, in the Spirit]
pray with us now for an end to the persistent absurdities of church division
as too for the pressures to uniformity, which harm the ecosystem of faith;
show us how Green Church is More Church,
that together, as your rainbow people
in covenant with everything whose breath
gives you praise
and us life
we rejoice in justice and compassion
always and ever through you,
Our God, Our Word, Our Breath, AMEN

Blessing / Closing prayer**Option 1: Alex Clare-Young****Closing Prayer**

Go now, as creatures of the earth, loved by the God who breathed you into being.
Go as kin to the cedar and the sparrow, to the mountain and the microscopic.
Go as people who know that the first sin was separation - and who are called, day
by day, to practise reconnection.
Go to love your neighbours near and far, to tend the ground beneath your feet, to
speak for those with no voice in the halls of power.

And may the Word who was in the beginning still speak through you. May the Light that the darkness cannot overcome shine in all that you do. May the God in whom you live and move and have your being go with you, in you, before you - now and always.
Amen.

Option 2:

To sustain

God makes

To share

God calls us

To call

God sends Christ

To Christ

We offer what we are, what we have

To the glory of God in the good of the world

With faith, with hope, with love

Thus enfolded and equipped for lives of love and justice
may God, Father Son and Spirit *[God, Beloved. Wild Wind]*
bless us through all that lies ahead, to the End of the Age **AMEN**

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MUSIC: Suggestions

- 1) **We warmly commend** the short Creation section, 153-165 in the supplementary '**God Welcomes All**', which begins with the very accessible **153 'God, the Maker of the Heavens'**, set to a fond and familiar tune. It may be good to use a verse on the first three Sundays, and the whole hymn on Sunday 4

- 2) **We suggest great caution** with what may be thought of as specific 'creation' hymns written in the late twentieth century without a consciousness of the crisis of nature and climate. These sometimes lack the relatedness of the singer to fellow creatures which we nonetheless find in many older hymns, which emphasise the participation of all creation in "universal praise" of God. We worship God **WITH** the Earth and fellow creatures, who are not just a means to this end. Simply for a hymn to **mention** creation or fellow creatures may not help deepen our spiritual understanding for this time of crisis.

- 3) **Iain McLarty and Trinity College** created a resource of music recommendations : "[Songs for Sunday](#)"

- 4) **CH4**
- has a huge number of hymns referenced for **Genesis 1 and 2**, some of which emphasise the Spirit in Creation, rather than Christ, who is the centre of this new Lectionary. **112, 118, 139, (593) 319** may be useful.
For John 1, try 133, 139, 141, 317, 780 (to introduce reflection)
238, 243, 244 also raise good points for justice and praise.

WEEK 1: Previous Lectionary (prior to 2026 provision for this Sunday)

Overview for this first week, with previous Lectionary

I hope you may be in a position to give priority to the new Lectionary being launched this year, but if your church situation does not yet permit that, we're provided material to support worship nonetheless, with especial gratitude to Peter Ranscombe of Saughtonhall United Reformed Church in Edinburgh, an independent student at the Scottish Episcopal Institute.

This particular set of readings has a strong theme of LAW -, both the moral will of God, and the problematic sets of human codes which struggle in the direction of justice. **Exodus 12** sets out how subsequent generations might retain the benefits of a sense urgency and responsiveness, which are ever more valuable in our own day. The Jekyll-and-Hyde **Psalms 149**, with notes by John Collings begins with fervent and uplifting praise to God, before descending into a violent vengefulness which Christians need to be extremely wary of. It's a reminder that we discern, rather than take as read "the Word of God in Scripture". **Ezekiel 33** is both stern and hopeful: setting out both for the people and for the prophet as the one charged with the "good news" of warning, the consequences of choosing either continued injustice or a change, a just transition. This has particular relevance to the extent to which churches are prepared to warn their people and wider society about the objectively harmful, sinful consequences of following strident voices still calling for new oil and gas exploration. The joining of most mainstream churches to the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation movement is significant: church is not a place of retreat from truth, especially from truth about the welfare of our global (and close) neighbours. The extract from the very long **Psalms 119** gives some of the rationale for these writers' rapturous love of the 'Law'. **Romans 13** has notes from Peter Ranscombe. Paul hasn't written this letter for endless discussion. It's a call to action now: to live the life of Jesus today. Finally, Matthew 18 applies the discipline of love to some extreme difficulties in local church life, as well as introducing the spiritual implications of the consciousness that all Creation is interconnected, interactive. A crisis of nature and climate is a crisis of earth and heaven. It's that spiritually serious.

Exodus 12:1-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

ECS Staff Exodus 12:1-14

Churches vary hugely in the importance they give to 'times and seasons', beyond Christmas, Easter, Pentecost Lent and Advent. Campaigners of all sorts have overwhelmed us with "this-and-that" Sunday.

What, for you, really marks the beginning of the year's worship?

It's the calendar, rooted in the cycles of Earth itself, relative to sun, moon and stars which does help us know who we are. Calendar is our relationship with Creation. Part of the recycling and repurposing of our lives.

Creation time/Creationtide/Season of Creation, all around the world, has now grown to be a time of valuable reflection for churches committed to reflecting on the missional implications of what it means to be a sign of hope in a time of multiple crisis. Working out what works for your congregation, and how, fruitfully to integrate this 'season' into Harvest and other things you feel you 'have to do' can be a fruitful challenge.

In this passage, no detail is insignificant, though the richness is such that we won't work it all out in worship together. That doesn't matter. This reading, full of instructions, whilst it does include some explanations, is also full of mystery. It requires of the people that they trust God in what may be some strange and costly matters. What parallels can you think of ?

The time of day matters, the time of the year matters, but even more, that God's people grow together. What do we do that brings us together? What do we do which divides us? Does faithfulness balance the cost of each?

Despite the stern detail of the instructions here offered, which would develop into the Passover festival, it's noticeable that there are concessions: the performance of faith is not dependent on wealth or 'size of household' . Let alone of church, (though neither is "two or three in my name" meant to be an upper limit!)

Festivals are both demanding and inclusive, and the instructions that become the Passover regulations as described here also re-equip us with a defining sense of urgency: a faithful hurriedness, which is all the more appropriate to the rapidly changing world in which we're found ourselves. Nothing about these instructions - these preparations to be God's people - allows for needless luxury. The bread is hurried and unleavened, the herbs are bitter:

" This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly"

What benefits for a community come with alertness and readiness to change ?

There's also a notable closeness between the human and non-human, which we miss when we see livestock only as 'assets'.

As with some indigenous people today, who see themselves as related to the creatures whom they nonetheless hunt, we note the unity of fate between the Egyptians and their domestic animals. The 'unblemished' lamb, part of the Hebrews' community has a similarly complex significance. How close do we feel to the fate of the fellow creatures, wild and domesticated, on whom we rely?

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Psalm 149

Hallelujah! Sing to the Lord a new song; sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful. Let Israel rejoice in his Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his Name in the dance; let them sing praise to him with timbrel and harp. For the Lord takes pleasure in his people and adorns the poor with victory. Let the faithful rejoice in triumph; let them be joyful on their beds. Let the praises of God be in their throat and a two-edged sword in their hand; To wreak vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples; To bind their kings in chains and their nobles with links of iron; To inflict on them the judgment decreed; this is glory for all his faithful people. Hallelujah!

John Collings :Psalm 149

lay preacher in the United Reformed Church, former trustee of EcoCongregation Scotland.

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 as it talks 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 v6 strange, how can we praise God while holding a weapon of war?

Looking at the great changes in the 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 was written about was 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 is far more like the situation since the industrial revolution. We could be described as being at war with the creation with pollution, emissions, massive mines for a variety of minerals, plants fed artificial fertilisers. Wars usually end eventually, 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 is every decision that we make and get back to the start of the psalm and "Sing to the LORD a new song" of freedom from the fear of rising oceans and climate chaos.

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Ezekiel 33:7-11

You, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, "O wicked ones, you shall surely die," and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

ECS Staff Ezekiel 33:7-11

The call of the prophet - and of churches- is to call a spade a spade. Our congregations may be endangered by any presentation of the dramatic texts of Ezekiel with a series of "merelys" : *merely* poetic, abstract, *merely* metaphorical, historical. These are texts for time of crisis, when facts and figures fail to shift hearts and minds.

The burden on those who present scripture, is heavy, though with others in the same boat, it can become rewarding (cf Mark 10:30) Remember: warnings, which mitigate against catastrophe, are good news. Those who warn are prophets of vigilance and salvation, not of gloom.

Vigilance, today, is supplied by scientists, solidifying "might" into "will" in cause and effect. Ezekiel's God asserts that sin is a life-and-death matter. In our day we confront much knowingly "sinful" behaviour: ecocide, entitled injustice and prejudice, nationalist exclusivism, and the complacent disregard of the connectedness of our common home, the Earth.

Pope Leo would add *"[derision and ridicule] of those who speak of global warming, and even [blaming] the poor for the very thing that affects them the most."*

The effect of denial, as in God's Word to Ezekiel, really are death:

- The death of neighbours who in thanks to universal communication are neither out of sight or mind.
- The death of fellow creatures, on whom, we finally learn, we absolutely depend;
- The death of the beauty, listed in the same breath as nourishment in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9);
- The death of human neighbours, and suffering caused by fossil fuels, (as a friend in an African church put it).

Visiting churches I tragically hear assertive voices setting themselves up as "sentinels" against recognition of the truth of the crisis of nature and climate which led the UK Government to publish a ["UK Govt National Security Assessment"](#). This shows how the integrity of endangered ecosystems thousands of miles from Scotland are vital to our own "security".

"Denial of crisis", may include political arguments purporting to be for the prosperity and security of our own particular community; but always this is at the cost of others, as if our world were not one connected and interactive creation. Love of neighbour, emerges as the key priority for security in a better world.

Our Gospel reading from Matthew 18 blessedly gives a loving approach for confronting such challenges within Christian community. God does "not desire the death" - or other exclusion from our communities - of those who behave wickedly, though the community must needs be safeguarded against such influences. Do the 'wicked' always know they are acting wickedly? Who is going to do them the favour of pointing it out?

With Ezekiel, we can hear the prophet's discernment of a compassionate hard line from God who is neither vengeful, nor the creator of doom without hope. In Ezekiel's message, because of the Word of God the 'easy option' of despair, and of feeling overwhelmed in the face of challenge, though understandable, is culpably irresponsible. But not irrevocable. Repentance starts a cascade of hope and the mitigation of disaster.

Is that the right way to engage your congregation?

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Psalm 119:33-40

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; I shall keep it with all my heart. Make me go in the path of your commandments, for that is my desire. Incline my heart to your decrees and not to unjust gain. Turn my eyes from watching what is worthless; give me life in your ways. Fulfill your promise to your servant, which you make to those who fear you. Turn away the reproach which I dread, because your judgments are good. Behold, I long for your commandments; in your righteousness preserve my life.

ECS Staff : Psalm 119:33-40

This is a very, very short extract : Psalm 119 has 176 verses and two and a half thousand words.

As with evening-filling poetry of other traditions, the structure also aims at epic beauty and wonder: an alphabetical acrostic of 22 sections, each representing one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each of which contains eight verses, at least in the way they're presented in our translations.

This (thank goodness) longest psalm in the book seems excessively, obsessively in love with 'the Law', being convinced of the many benefits, though here we also observe that this all-consuming loyalty is firstly not blindly unfounded, and secondly demanding of some effort.

Maybe this psalmist is like that person that every congregation actually needs, who is so dedicated to their task that they end up shifting others, even the indifferent, after all. Within the movement of EcoCongregation Scotland, we're frequently deeply grateful for those with the courage and dedication to be just a wee bit awkward. Especially where the root of such awkwardness really is love of God and of your neighbour, human or otherwise.

In these verses, we hear how the gift of "understanding" is necessary to make the most of the gift of the moral will of God in the Law, and with this awareness is retained something so very distant from "*God's in charge, so everything's going to be all right!*"

It's precisely because of the very real danger and pitfalls, the opportunities to be led astray, and that to our genuine peril, that for this psalmist, study and intimate familiarity are so rewarding, beyond the evident delight, in its own right with which the texts are approached; beyond the beauty with which they are presented.

And for the psalmist, the law is truly beautiful. How many times do we skim over descriptions of beauty in Scripture, whether of nature or of the 'Law'. Beauty nourishes us, as does food! Beauty is not an expendable ornament of our life: it makes laws and practicalities more palatable; it enriches and sustains our worship of God. What is beautiful about the life of your church?

The 'fear of God' as mentioned, is the inspiring respect, very different from the 'dread' of what would follow from denial of the truth, neglect of God's Law.

Finally: it's because the dangers are real that the "Law" is all the more valuable. Once more, the claims to prosperity from those who promote what is unjust (rather than merely, technically unlawful) need naming and identifying in our day.

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Romans 13:8-14

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Peter Ranscombe: Romans 13:8-14

"Who is my neighbour?" asks the 'expert in the law' in Luke 10:25-37. That same question ran through my mind after reading, praying, and reflecting upon Romans 13:8-14.

For congregations rooted in a specific location, our neighbours live under the chimneys pots surrounding our building; our relatives and friends, our colleagues and classmates. For gathered or online congregations, our neighbours may live further away but will be equally familiar; our WhatsApp group and Zoom allies, our Facebook friends and Substack subscribers.

Charities such as Christian Aid, Tearfund, and SCIAF have taught us over the years that our neighbours live on the other side of the planet as well as the other side of the street. The climate crisis underlines that link – each time we needlessly use our car or thoughtlessly create AI slop, we put lives in danger from rising sea-levels and failing crops.

In this Season of Creation, "Who is my neighbour?". As William Draper put it in his arrangement of St Francis of Assisi's words to create the hymn "All creatures of our God and King", our neighbours also include "bright brother sun" and "clear sister moon", "great mother earth" and the flowers and fruits, water and fire that fill the old hymn's verses.

Once we recognise that our neighbours are not solely the humans who live two doors down but also the humans who live two flights away – and, equally importantly, the fellow creatures who share our homeland and our neighbours' homelands – then Paul's commands to the church in Rome take on a fresh meaning:

- you shall not commit adultery – I must not betray the people I love or the creatures I live beside by dropping vapes on the street or leaving behind dog poo bags, thinking someone else will pick them up when really they're my responsibility;
- you shall not murder – if I'm older or unwell and I feel cold then I can still put my heating on, but if I'm younger and fitter then I must think about putting on a jumper

rather than turning up my radiator to reduce Scotland's use of natural gas and heating oil, and thereby reduce the threat to lives both here and overseas;

- you shall not steal – I must not take more food than I need when I'm shopping, especially if I know deep down in my heart that it's going to go to waste at the end of the week, adding to the methane that's warming the atmosphere, or instead turn my freezer into my friend by saving leftovers for quick meals;
- you shall not covet – I must not be greedy for more and more and more, especially when that "more" is stuff I don't really need that's produced on the other side of the planet then shipped to me through online shops.

In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus answers the question from the 'expert in the law' by telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Our neighbour is often the person we least suspect; not solely the neighbour in human form, but also the neighbour who swims or slithers, or wears fur or feathers.

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Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

ECS Staff Matthew 18:15-20

Love is the discipline which holds together the dedicated community of disciples which translators have been content to render as "church" though of course, following the narrative of Matthew 18, this was some years ahead. However: speculations about precisely when this teaching became part of the life of the Earliest Church matter little: the community that gave us the Gospel passes it on with the authority of Christ. We're given a strong reminder to have the collective courage to deal - lovingly and together - with behaviour which endangers both the individual and the community of faith.

This certainly now has a bearing on the strong current of 'climate denial' so vigorously promoted by fossil fuel and related interests, and by well-resourced and devious means. It's also part of the programme of "Christian nationalism" and some populist politics. Simply, this does harm, both to the church's witness, and also, spiritually, to their members' prayerful response to build spiritual resilience appropriate to the urgency of this age.

When we can read, without challenge - for instance, in a popular farming magazine - that the climate crisis is an "illusory threat" then the up-front cost of change, which is, long-term, so much more beneficial than doing nothing, then framing public mission witness and

discipleship around some basic choices and actions, for instance, to reduce carbon footprint, begins to look like an intolerable alien imposition.

The facts of the crisis may then seem like 'opinion', rather than a challenge, without exception, to respond in love for your neighbour and yourself.

It's completely clear that you don't have to be unintelligent or badly educated, to be caught up in the ingenious variety of websites and media campaigns, which this year reached ridiculous level, with some UK newspapers touting figures of many trillions of pounds for the transition ahead. Meanwhile, the UK Climate Change Committee confirmed that the total net additional cost of the UK's transition to Net Zero by 2050 is less than the financial damage caused by a single major fossil fuel price shock, such as the 2022 energy crisis.

But all that is needed to damage community is to sow doubt in the demanding common tasks that build them up.

It's therefore by no means loving, simply to ignore, or avoid disagreement when people get their teeth into denialist teaching, but the challenge remains to reach out with genuine love and vulnerability, to help everyone remain part of the fellowship.

Finally, this very special passage hints at the interwovenness of the whole of Creation: the speech of "binding and loosing" reminds us of the profound and genuine truths that actions and decisions in one part of the interconnected reality of "heave-and-earth" or "sky-and-soil" will have consequences. That's why most of our mainstream churches have felt called to join the 'Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation' campaign: new oil and gas is the choice to hurt your neighbour.

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Sermon ideas: Romans 13:8-14

- (1) **v10: 'Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.'** – Start by asking who is your neighbour? This will vary from congregation to congregation; for some, it will be the community in which your building stands, while for others it might be the people you encounter during the week, either in person at school or work, or online. During this Season of Creation, can you expand that idea to include the birds that come to the feeder in your garden or the ducks that bob along the local river? What does loving them look like? Could it be organising a litter pick in your local park – and then telling your local newspaper or website about it to demonstrate God's love for all creation? Could it be inviting your congregation to rethink how you gather at your building by taking the bus in urban areas or sharing lifts in a car in rural areas?
- (2) **v11: 'You know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep.'** – It's easy to sleepwalk into bad habits: taking the car to the nearby shops instead of walking to get some exercise; ordering objects that we don't need through online retailers after clicking through on links from social media channels;

buying more than we need at the supermarket and throwing out the unused food at the end of the week. Perhaps one of the biggest threats into which we're sleepwalking is the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) – asking chatbots to do research for us, rather than using a simpler search engine. The environmental cost is much higher in terms of the electricity and water that data centres use to run AI, destroying the lives not only of our human neighbours but also our fellow creatures with whom we share God's planet. Is the Holy Spirit using Paul's command to the Romans to also invite our congregations to stir from our slumbers and wake up to the threats that we're in danger of worsening through our sleepwalking?

- (3) **Group discussion: 'Who is my neighbour?'** – Paul tells the church in Rome to love its neighbours, but who are our neighbours here in this place and how can we show our love for them? Ask each group to discuss who their neighbours might be and how they can help them. Get them to report back to the wider gathering if they feel confident enough to do so. Try to listen to what's said (or not said?) and perhaps try to draw out some of the wider themes that emerge. Could this discussion become the basis for your church's next piece of outreach/mission/evangelism? Could one or more of the ideas become the basis to work towards an award from Eco-Congregation Scotland? (more details at <https://ecocongregationscotland.org/get-involved/awards/>)

WORSHIP MATERIAL FOR PREVIOUS LECTIONARY: From Peter Ranscombe

Gathering prayer

Creator God,

Thank you for gathering us together to worship you today.

Thank you for surrounding us with our neighbours, the ones with skin and hair, and the ones with scales and fur.

Thank you for making us partners with all the creatures in your creation.

As we continue our journey through this Season of Creation, please open our hearts and our minds today to your Word through the Bible and your Holy Spirit's whispers to each and every one of us,

So that we hear your call to service and join you in your eternal dance.

We pray in the name of your son and our ascended saviour, Jesus your Christ, Jesus our Messiah.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon

Loving God,

You warn us again and again through scripture: "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet."

You call on us to conduct ourselves properly: "No orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy."

You even give us a command that's easy to remember: "Love your neighbour as you love yourself."

Yet still we don't listen – still we try to follow our own path instead of heeding your word.

Please forgive us for not listening.

Please forgive us for hurting each other.

Please forgive us for hurting this planet.

Please forgive us for hurting all our partners in your creation.

And, in a moment of silence, please forgive us for the sins that are weighing heavily on our hearts today...

[silence]

Merciful God,

Thank you for waking us from the slumber of our sins and leading us into the bright morning of your forgiveness.

Please help us to forgive other people, as you have forgiven us.

We praise and thank you, and pray for your help, in the name of your son, and our ascended saviour, Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

[One voice] Generous God, thank you for our journey through this Season of Creation.

[Many voices] Thank you for making us partners with all your creatures in your creation.

[One voice] Thank you for the brightness that brings energy to the day.

[Many voices] Thank you for the darkness that brings rest to the night.

[One voice] Thank you for sending us Jesus to guide our way.

[Many voices] Thank you for his command to love our neighbour.

[One voice] Thank you for the love that we receive from our neighbours.

[Many voices] Thank you for the chance to share your love with our neighbours.

[One voice] Please hear these, and all our prayers, in the name of your son, and our saviour, Christ Jesus:

[All] Amen.

Prayer for Others

God of the homeless,

We cry out in lament today for those whose lives have been shattered by climate change...

For those whose homes have been washed away by the sea or by floods...

For those whose farms have been destroyed by drought or disease...

For those who risk their very lives at land or at sea to find work to feed their families...

Please place your gospel message on the hearts of politicians and civil servants to stop squabbling and grandstanding, and instead to show love to their neighbours.

And please give us the courage and the energy to write our letters and our emails to pressure our leaders into taking action.

God of the helpless,

Please send your Holy Spirit to help people who are now beyond the help of human hands.

Please heal those who are sick, whether in body, or mind, or spirit.

Please strengthen those who are awaiting test results or treatment, or for whom treatment is coming to an end.

Please comfort those who grieve, whether that grief is fresh or from long ago.

Please wrap your loving arms around those who are lonely – please help them to feel the warmth of your presence.

And, in a moment of silence, we pray for all those people whose names you've placed on our hearts today...

[silence]

God of the restless,

Please wake us from our slumbers so that we take action.

Please shift our focus from our own lives to the lives of our neighbours.

Please fill us with your life-giving energy to that we may act as your hands and your feet in this world.

And please bring us safely to that moment when we will be reunited with those who have gone before us in the faith, "bright brother sun" and "clear sister moon", singing the hymns of your unending glory, joining our voices with all our fellow creatures in your creation.

We pray in the name of Christ Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Blessing

May the trunk of God's tree give us strength.

May the arm of God's branch give us reach.

May the shade of God's leaf give us rest.

Amen.