

starters for Sunday

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

11 September 2016

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Ian Alexander, Council Secretary to World Mission Council, for his thoughts on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.

This week's Starters for Sunday comes in the form of a sermon idea and prayers from World Mission. Further exegesis can be found on pages [11-13](#).

Contents

Sermon Ideas	2
Time with Children.....	5
Prayers.....	6
Musical Suggestions	10
Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28	11
Psalms 14.....	12
1 Timothy 1: 12-17	12
Luke 15: 1-10	13
Additional Resources.....	14



Quick Guide...

Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

Sermon Ideas

Theme: Repent of our misuse of creation. We are the inheritors of the earth, those who have responsibility to be proper stewards.

Luke tells us that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who do not need it. In the world today, there are few without sin, and even fewer who have not done something which causes harm to the world in which we live, God's created order.

"The firstborn child has a special status. The earth is the firstborn of creation, created before the human beings, so we should respect the earth and hold it in a special status." Rev Maurice Munthali, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Livingstonia Synod.

Among the most pressing concerns for the world church is that of the whole created order, ensuring its sustainable future, and the responsibility of the human race to deal sensitively and gently with it. So many partners of the Church of Scotland are in the front line of changes which may see their lands experiencing desertification from the degradation of the plant and forest life, or inundated with water as sea levels rise, or taken from them by land-grabbers – all of which impoverish the lives of individuals and communities.

September 1st was proclaimed as a day of prayer for the environment by the late Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I of Constantinople in 1989, and today his successor, Patriarch Bartholomew I, is perhaps the most outspoken church leader on climate change. The Orthodox Church year starts that day with a commemoration of how God created the world. On Oct 4, many other churches commemorate Francis of Assisi, well known for his love of the created order and his way of being at home with and in creation. The weeks in between have been declared as Time



for Creation¹ by the World Council of Churches to remind us of the sacredness of the created order and to help us, through prayer and action, to raise up awareness of the inherent godliness of the whole creation. Guillermo Kerber, a Uruguayan Catholic working on creation issues with the WCC, urges Christians to use this window to pray, fast, meditate, and so ‘feed our faith and hope’, deepening our sense of being part of creation and praising God for its beauty. Pope Francis has also played a role in helping to engage the world on environmental and ecological issues with the publication of *Laudato Si*, an encyclical which challenges the culture of consumerism and what the Pope sees as the developed world's indifference to the destruction of the planet in pursuit of short-term economic gains, or as Rowan Williams puts it, Christians need to regain a sense that our relationship to the earth is about ‘communion not consumption’. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.

The United Church of Zambia (UCZ) General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Peggy Mulambya Kabonde, emphasises, ‘It is too simplistic to portray climate change as the fulfilment of the biblical “end times” prophecy. Nevertheless, the UCZ has organised prayer meetings to address climate change and its visible impact. The Church must be a watch dog on behalf of the people and must understand and be involved in the climate change discourse, as it is a complex and moral struggle which requires political engagement to try and influence policy.’ The UCZ, with the Christian Council of Zambia, has worked through its Disaster Risk Reduction programme to encourage and help Church Committees to take on tree planting, good forest management practices and sustainable agriculture.

Jeremiah 4, and other prophets emphasises that creation is important to God. It highlights how the whole creation suffers when God's people repeatedly fail to follow God's ways: it is “waste and void,” the mountains are quaking, “the birds of the air had fled,” “the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins.” The creation groans. But as Jesus emphasises in Luke, we can repent, we can change our ways, we can find restoration. Jeremiah suggests that the people are clueless, but today we are not clueless, we do know the things that make for a good environment and a healthy planet.

¹ Worship resources are available here: www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/time-for-creation



The Church of Scotland is committed to emphasising the duty Christian people have for caring for the whole earth. The WMC raised the profile of climate change throughout 2015 through cross-Council working, especially with Church and Society (WMC is a significant contributor to the work of the climate change programme), and in partnership with Christian Aid, and Eco-Congregation Scotland. Raising awareness and gathering church members for the climate rally in Edinburgh, the climate lobby in London and the climate talks in Paris, the WMC is dedicated to demonstrating its commitment to encouraging church members to raise their voices and advocate climate justice and a respectful attitude to all God's creation. Future actions include the upcoming Care for Creation conference in Bridge of Allan on 1 October 2016 in partnership with the Church and Society Council, the Guild and Christian Aid.

We are all interconnected and interdependent. If the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, we need to recognise our responsibility for others. Changes to the climate as well as non-climate related natural disasters are not just challenges to particular places, they also impact the lives of people. There is an element of enlightened self-interest in tackling the issues of climate change caused by global warming, or pollution and waste caused by over-consumption; but the Church around the world must go further than speak out about climate change and pollution — we must challenge attitudes (including our own) by practising, promoting and encouraging a renewed reverence and respect for the whole of creation and, in particular, the way we relate to our planet. Whether we think of the planet in a South American (or Franciscan) way as 'Mother Earth' or with an African emphasis as the 'firstborn,' or simply recognise the presence of God in the whole created order around us as Christ did, we need theologies and spiritualities which recognise that "the earth is the Lord's" and not ours. Christ reconciles the whole creation to God, not just humanity (Colossians 1:20). Jesus' resurrection is but the beginning of the restoration not only of humanity, but of all things. And we need to continue with the development of ways of living that are better attuned to the rhythms of the natural world and in harmony with the rest of creation.



Time with Children



Have a pile of clean bottles, ask the kids what to do with them. Are they any use or are they just rubbish? Then produce a couple of things made with the bottles – eg a shaker or a plant pot. Then tell the story of a wee boy called Peter (age 10) in South Sudan. Peter lives in a refugee camp with his mum and his sisters. They have nothing because they fled their home because of the war and have nowhere to crop food. Peter goes out each day and collects plastic bottles and walks one mile to the bore hole and fills them with clean drinking water and then sells them to people living around him in the refugee camp. With the money he makes from selling the water, he is able to buy small amounts of food for his family.

God has given us a responsibility to look after the world that he has created – so next time you have an empty bottle, do not just throw it away, reuse it or recycle it and remember Peter and people like him throughout the world.



Prayers

Lord God, we know you are our creator.

You created us in your own image.

You gave us responsibility of dominion over the earth and all in it.

We repent that we have not been good stewards of your creation.

We have caused global warming through burning fossil fuels,

we have cut down a lot of trees without replacing them,

we have advanced in technology and increased in population,

hence manufacturing machines that pollute your nature,

we have constantly benefitted from the natural resources and in return giving nothing back.

Lord, grant us your wisdom, so that we may turn back and preserve our environment.

Help us to always stick to the proper use of the natural resources

so that we do not continually harm climate.

We ask all of these in Jesus name,

Amen.

(Rev Emmanuel Ngambeki, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Karagwe Diocese, Tanzania)

We ruin life by starting the fire in our woods

We replace the fresh air with smoke

We poison our clean water and bath our children with waste

We killed our grandchildren by inheriting them poison and pest

God, have mercy on us

O God, we are ignoring the natural disaster, but nature is you.

We are speechless, afraid of the laws abusing the nature. And we are scared of YOU.

And even a church as your body, often keeps quiet looking for a safe place.

O God we are waiting for the new the heaven and earth where the truth and justice belong to all your creation

O God, have a mercy of Lord

(Karo Batak Protestant Church (GBKP), Worship, Medan, Indonesia, 2012)



O Lord our God, the author and giver of all good things,
we thank you for all your mercies, and for your loving care over all your creatures.
We bless you for the gift of life, for your protection round about us,
for your guiding upon us, and the tokens of your love within us.
We thank you for friendship and duty, for good hopes and precious memories,
for the joys that cheer us and the trials that teach us to trust in you.
Most of all we thank you for saving knowledge of your Son our saviour;
for the living presence of your Spirit, the comforter...
In all these things, o heavenly Father, make us wise unto a right use of your benefits
that we may render an acceptable thanksgiving unto you all the days of our life.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(The Book of Common Order)

We have been guests of Jesus Christ.
We have received God's good gifts.
Now we go to our homes,
to our neighbours, to our work
equipped to put Jesus' words and being into action,
to be the salt of the world,
to seek justice,
to make peace,
to preserve the creation,
to gain life.
Amen.

(2nd European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz, Europe, 1997)



Prayer

God of all places and climes,
we are glad to thank you for our friends and partners
in faith and vision throughout the world,
for people with the strength of character
to survive in difficult circumstances,
And to live out their faith
In joy and thanksgiving for all your gifts.

God of all people and nations,
God who loves all
without distinction of colour or feature
Hear our prayers for the people and churches of the world
Who stand firm in the face of injustice and,
with imagination and determination,
share a spirit of adventure which can lead to miracles.

Generous God, we give thanks for the life of faith,
and being able to share it freely.
We pray for your people,
Who face persecution,
and help them to offer love freely
to one and to all, no matter their faith or religion.

Loving Christ, born in simplicity,
May your Living Stones be salt to all,
That both hope and justice may be real;
that prejudice and bigotry be banished.
Awaken all people from complacency
and give us courage to invest in peace.



God who is always close,
We remember our neighbours,
And pray for all you churches and peoples.
You promise us your Holy Spirit: Come Holy Spirit,
Clear away the cobwebs of complex histories
Tangled thoughts, and messy motives,
And help us all to flourish, living your love in our daily lives

Loving God, you challenge us to be a place of welcome,
A Church without walls,
offering your love, care and compassion
to those who need it most.
Lord, help us to be people of courage,
That our Church may be a witness to your vision
of how we should live together. Amen.

(World Mission Council)



In addition to the above prayers, prepared by our contributor, other prayers may be found in *People of the Way* which is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It was also the theme for Heart and Soul 2016. *People of the Way* is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



Musical Suggestions

CH4 244	Where are the voices for the earth.
CH4 462	The King of Love my Shepherd is
CH4 110	Glory be to God the Father
CH4 127	O Worship the King
CH4 129	The Lord is King
CH4 356	Meekness & Majesty
CH4 40	O God be gracious to me in your love
CH4 501	Take this moment sign and space
CH4 718	We cannot measure how you heal
CH4 788	Mungu ni mwema (Know that God is good)
CH4 803	We will walk with God
	*Beside us (see MP4)



[Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28](#)

The modern, industrial age has been characterised by some, on the more mystical wing of the Green Movement, as an Age of Exploitation and Plunder. Humanity has quarried wealth for itself out of the earth, laying waste huge swathes of the planet, its land, rivers and seas choked with waste and toxicity. People have become bloated on wealth on the back of the slave trade and the exploitation of the poor. The rich have become richer by hoarding the world's wealth and the poor continue to lose out even today, 200 years after the abolition of the slave trade. Global warming reminds us that the earth is not endlessly abundant and as immune to our exploitative ways as we might have imagined. Ours has been characterised as the 'Suicide Economy'. There are indeed 'limits to growth' and the words of Jeremiah ring in our ears, 'for my people are foolish, they do not know me... they are skilled in doing evil but do not know how to do good'.

Jeremiah goes on to describe an apocalyptic vision that could be written for today's world, 'the birds of the air had fled...the fruitful earth was a desert'. An arid lifeless planet is the consequence of humanity's persistent foolishness. Is a world laid 'waste and void' what awaits us unless we repent and think again? As Walter Bruegemann puts it, 'I would not have thought that the universe rested its future on our capacity to do good'.

The mystical tradition within the ecological movement anticipates a paradigm shift in human behaviour; a spiritual revival that will perhaps be the only chance of saving the planet. This is not a management fix that will sort out the environmental problem so that we can return to business as usual. The call is for a true repentance, a change of heart and mindset to carry us from the Age of Plunder to the Age of Healing. The call is for humanity to be a more benign and respectful presence to creation and to our fellow earth citizens. It is a call to a more generous and inclusive system of economics as though people, communities, cultures, individuals and the earth itself matter. 'Yet I will not make a full end' is how the passage ends. God will not give up on wayward humanity.

Sometimes we need to tell it like it is, to give voice to the reality of the desolation and despair that visited Christ on the Cross and visits places and peoples on the planet still. Jeremiah's vision is one such moment that articulates the idea of 'departed glory' and the prospect of desolation as a consequence of our persistent foolishness. However, the last word is not condemnation



but the possibility of redemption. The call, in the present context, is for a change of heart. Can we move from the Age of Plunder to the Age of Healing?

[Psalm 14](#)

The famous phrase, 'Fools say in their hearts, there is no God', is one that will be familiar even to those who do not read their Bibles. In the context of contemporary society, where belief in God is often reduced to a mere matter of opinion, the objective existence or non existence of God would seem to be the starting point for a sermon based on this text. However, the preacher would be the fool if she were to assert that those who take the philosophical view that there is no supernatural deity were all stupid. Some of the most learned thinkers in history have made this assertion and some of the greatest have also asserted the exact opposite.

In the pre-modern context in which the psalmist was writing, it is more reasonable to suppose that people were not discussing the reality of the supernatural, or indeed reducing faith to personal opinions. Rather this psalm is an attack on those who live as though there were no God. Even church going, card carrying Christians do this, and some of the most ardent atheists can be amongst the most virtuous and compassionate of people. Belief in the objective reality of God is no guarantee of ethical behaviour. The psalmist is taking issue with people who are a law unto themselves, people who have no humility and exercise no restraint. Affirming the reality of the Divine must result in a practical, ethical response.

[1 Timothy 1: 12-17](#)

Personal testimony about the conversion of people's manner has to be handled carefully in the Christian context. It is easy for those with a dramatic story to tell of their transformation either to be elevated to a position of high status, or to make others feel like they are second rate Christians because they have a less interesting spiritual journey to narrate. The temptation to use narrative to illustrate deep truths is strong, but we should note how rare it is in the Bible. Paul does not speak much of his own conversion (the famous description of his Damascus Road experience is conveyed by the pen of Luke). Here, Paul (if it is indeed him), is unusually candid about his own experience. He relates how he was once a man of violence, a persecutor of Christians and a blasphemer. However, he attempts to deflect attention from himself by the



assertion that ‘Christ came into the world to save sinners’. Two points can be drawn out of this text, first, that it is the Spirit working through people that should rightfully be the focus of our attention, for it was not Paul, but the Spirit working in him that has effected change. So often we can be seduced by a dangerous impulse to admire the achievement, piety or zeal of an individual. Secondly, and this fits in with the theme of all our readings today, no matter how far away people are, the Spirit will not give up on us and actively seeks out the lost. No one is beyond redemption and transformation through the power of the Gospel.

[Luke 15: 1-10](#)

There is something quite reckless and troubling about Jesus’ parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The shepherd will abandon his sheep in the wilderness in order to seek out the one that is lost. It is almost as though Jesus is saying that the sheep that are not lost can be legitimately exposed to risk for the sake of securing the one that has gone astray. This is a challenge for any congregation of God’s people who believe that at some level the church exists for those who are outside its boundaries. A ministry focussed on the outsider, the stranger, (and indeed the parish), may well invite opposition from insiders who believe that they have ‘paid for their ticket’ and that they do not deserve to be abandoned in the wilderness.

The parables depict the extent of God’s concern for all of God’s people and reveal just how far God will go to search out and restore a relationship with those whom God loves. When one who is far away has been found, there is reason to throw a party. Our dour Presbyterian tradition has often found it difficult to deal with the aspect of celebration that frequently crops up in scripture, but even the angels would not wish to miss one of God’s parties.

An amusing anecdote I picked up years ago, and I cannot remember the source, suggests that when the first missionaries to the Inuit people attempted to translate the Bible they stumbled over the word, joy. Presumably, in that bleak, icy landscape there was not much need for such a word, until someone pointed out the Inuit’s dogs that were always full of joy at the end of a hard day of sledge pulling. The sentence is apparently translated, ‘there will be more tail wagging in heaven over one sinner that repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance!’



Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [People of the Way](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Ian Alexander for providing us with this Sunday's material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

