

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 30 September 2018

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank members of the ecumenical Creation Time 2018 Writing Group, for their thoughts on the nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Creation Time 2018 – Week 5: Passing our planet on: passing on the gift of discipleship.

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Introduction

Worship material for Creation Time 2018 comes from an ecumenical writing group, with contributors from the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church.

It follows the theme “Passing our Planet on: God’s gift to us”, linking to Scotland’s Year of Young People, also highlighted in our Annual Gathering in April. It reflects on our planet passing on from one generation to the next, and the gifts given us by God to support and guide us in our care for creation.

Readings from the Gospel of Mark are emphasised, which appear in the Revised Common Lectionary in September.

About Creation Time

Creation Time started in the Orthodox Church in 1989 and has been supported by a growing number of churches across Europe since then. The European Christian Environmental Network has urged churches to adopt a Time for Creation, stretching from 1 September to the feast of St Francis on 4 October. This was endorsed at the European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania in 2007, when it was agreed that Creation Time “be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change”.

This year Christian leaders signed a joint statement of support for the Season of Creation. This represents the first joint statement of support for the season reaching across denominations

http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Season_of_Creation_2018.pdf

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Miriam McHardy is a member of the Roman Catholic Church and has worked for many years in the area of faith, justice and the environment. As part of a relatively new eco-congregation she is interested in exploring how our faith can support care for our planet.

Lindsey Sanderson is a United Reformed Church minister, serving three congregations in the Joint Pastorate of East Kilbride and Hamilton. One of her congregations, Righead URC, is in the process of applying for an Eco-Congregation Award.

[Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22](#)

This reading from the book of Esther reflects on a main concern in the whole book: how can one be a faithful Jew in a foreign environment? Picking up on other writings of the time, the book considers different solutions. One of the most obvious might have been to cut themselves off completely from mainstream society, and create communities where they could be protected from the pollution of another faith and culture.

Esther makes a different argument however. It contends instead that the Jewish people should become active participants in the affairs of society. It challenges them to recognise the good elements of the society in which they live, and to cooperate where possible. At the same time they are encouraged to take responsibility and tackle the problems they face rather than waiting for God to produce miraculous solutions: to use the skills and talents they have been gifted by God. We see this demonstrated in Esther herself as she works to challenge the injustice she sees and to protect her fellow Jews with imagination, diplomacy and trust in the fairness of life.

For us today, we might read this as a challenge to Christians not to cut ourselves off from mainstream society, speaking only to ourselves. Instead we might ask, how do we recognise what is good in our society? How might we look for ways to work with those from different faiths and none, who also have a desire to cooperate for the common good?

This is all the more important for those of us engaged in work for environmental protection. We know that it is only by being part of wider movements, made up many different groups and individuals that we can make change happen. In Scotland alone, the Stop Climate

Chaos Coalition has brought together faiths, campaign groups and individuals of all backgrounds to campaign together on climate change.

Finally, as we consider our desire to pass our planet on to future generations, we might consider what we learn from Esther. How does it encourage us to move out of our generational comfort zones and work with those both older and younger than us? What can we learn from the God given gift and talents of other generations that will enable us to work together and better protect our environment?

[Psalm 124](#)

Our psalm today is a thanksgiving psalm that was perhaps written as part of an act of national or communal thanksgiving after the Jewish people had survived a military attack. The psalm begins by highlighting the danger the people were in (vv.1-5) then moves on to give thanks for God's deliverance of them from danger.

At the very start of the psalm David twice calls on the people of Israel to recognise that they would not have been saved if God had not been on their side. This reminds the people that God is, was and always will be with them, in times of trouble and of peace. Luther argues that "This repetition is not in vain. For whilst we are in danger, our fear is without measure; but when it is once past, we imagine it to have been less than it was indeed." (Luther, cited: Spurgeon). The psalmist encourages all of Israel to repeat it, as all of the people need to recognise that God helps and saves them. It goes on to urge people to recognise what might have happened if God had not come to their aid: "The waters would have closed over us, the torrent would have swept us away".

The psalm then becomes a powerful prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God, using lots of poetic, nature-filled language to describe the many dangers that God saved them from. It finishes with a recognition that God is their help at all times, despite being the mighty God who created heaven and earth!

The poetic language of nature and destruction probably speaks to many of us today, concerned about our environment and the increasing impact of climate change on countries and communities. How many of us listening to this psalm will remember news reports of storms and environmental destruction, such as the awful storms in the Caribbean last year, generally recognised as a consequence of climate change? Like the psalmist here, do we look to God as our help and guide to inspire and encourage us in our action to change our behaviour and be better stewards of our world?

As we reflect this week on the gift of discipleship, how might this psalm remind us to turn to God in times of need and challenge? How might the gift of discipleship both challenge and support us in our care for God's creation?

James 5:13-20

James' letter is perhaps better known for some of its more hard-hitting reflections. He is particularly strong on the treatment of the poor, and challenging to those who claim to have faith but fail to undertake good deeds.

This final section has a different focus, but is by no means an afterthought. It's telling us something important about what James thinks should be the priorities in the life of a Christian, and for him a central priority should be prayer!

James begins by reminding people that prayer should be our focus at all times of life, in good times or bad. We have been reminded previously in the psalm that God is always with us, waiting for our attention and intentions. As people called to discipleship we might view this exhortation as offering advice and encouragement of what might help us in our actions as disciples. How often do we think we can manage by ourselves and forget that God is always waiting to be invited into life and action? Prayer can be a source of nourishment and reflection that enables us to better focus our action for God and how we treat others.

James goes on to highlight two models of prayer that encourage us to think of the needs of others: healing the sick and intercessory prayer. Healing and care of the sick was central to the life of Jesus and His ministry, and part of the commissioning of the seventy-two (Luke 10:9). James also reminds us that even Elijah interceded on behalf of others, sometimes for something as basic as rain for the crops.

In our own ministry today as disciples, how might we encourage others (especially younger generations in this Year of Young People) to recognise the value of prayer as something that can support and sustain our action? Can we inspire and assist others to bring prayer into the heart of our action for climate justice, along with those most affected by it?

Mark 9: 38-50

Our gospel reading today focuses strongly on the theme of discipleship. It is part of a longer passage on this theme, bringing together different teachings on what discipleship means.

In the lead-up to this section Jesus had given another explanation of what it meant for Him to be the Messiah, with a second prediction of His passion. It goes on to challenge the apostles' understanding of what discipleship means for them, calling them to service of others rather than greatness for themselves.

As we come into this passage we hear the apostles challenging a man who is curing people in Jesus' name. This verse is a parallel of the story of Eldad and Medad, Numbers 11:24-29, (which might be used today also) who prophesied without being registered. Jesus shows great tolerance to the unauthorised exorcist, arguing that anyone who works in His name is unlikely to speak, or work, against Him. In this verse, and in verse 37, great emphasis is placed on action in the name of Jesus.

This tolerance by Jesus might also be a reminder to the apostles, and ourselves, that it is not for us to judge who God works through, or who is excluded. It may have been used to challenge tendencies towards cliques in the early church, reminding them that God was open to working with and through everyone. It might still be a reminder to us today to be hospitable communities, opening our ministries and opportunities for service to new people, especially younger generations. Jesus goes on to emphasise that it is often through others actions that we truly see love of God and neighbour.

This passage ends with a challenge to the apostles, and us, on being good disciples. What might we do that makes us a block or an obstacle to the faith of others, especially "these little ones"? How do we ensure we are welcoming and hospitable, encouraging others in their own love of God and others?

On this last Sunday of Creation Time it might be useful to read this passage along with the earlier passage from Esther. Are we at risk of becoming an insular faith that only speaks to itself, or do we open ourselves up to working with others of different faiths and none, for the common good? Many of us will be aware of the value and richness of working with individuals and groups from all backgrounds, in our concern for the environment. This passage reminds us that God works where God will, often in the places that most surprise us.

Sermon ideas

As we draw to the end of September and our celebration of Creation Time, our readings today have encouraged us to reflect on the gift of discipleship. Throughout this month we have contemplated a number of the gifts given us by God: our planet itself, God's wider creation, and the gifts that enable us to protect and share that creation for generations to come.

Today our readings offer us advice and ideas on being good disciples – followers of Christ and all that means for us. Along with reminders to work with others, to keep God central, and to pray at all times, Mark's gospel reminds us that discipleship is hard. It is a radical choice that requires our commitment and openness to where God might be calling us. The idea of discipleship being a gift, like wisdom and hope, may appear strange at first. We typically see a gift in terms of what we gain rather than what it costs us. In today's gospel however we're reminded that discipleship has a cost. It challenges us to give up worldly ambition and wealth, and be open instead to what we give to others. Yet when we do accept God's gift and become true disciples of Christ it draws us into relationship – with God and others. Relationships that are deeper and more fulfilling than anything we have known before.

As we draw to the end of Creation Time then, how might this gift of discipleship enable us to be in a better relationship with all of God's creation? We are often aware, when we become involved in environmental issues, of what we will have to give up and what is broken in our world.

Pope Francis, in his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si*, argues instead that if we approach care for creation as disciples of Jesus, we start to recognise how much we also gain: "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth." (*Laudato Si* 92).

The gift of discipleship reminds us that we are drawn into relationship with God, each other and our common home, if we are open to it.

As old and young, rich and poor, people of faith and no faith campaign together for climate justice, our discipleship helps us to realise that our relationship is no longer as strangers. We are working instead with our brothers and sisters – now, and for tomorrow.

Time with children

Introduction:

Before you begin you're going to need a few things!

A bowl of salt

Some salted biscuits.

Some unseasoned biscuits

A large sheet of paper with the outline of a large salt cellar drawn on it

Circles of plain paper, sticky on one side

Pens

N.B. Before you start check if anyone has allergies to any of the ingredients.

Invite the children to taste the two different types of biscuits. Can they taste any difference between them?

When they do, do they know what the difference is? Can they taste the salt?

Now give each child some grains of salt in their hands. Encourage them to look at the size of the grains, how tiny they are. If they feel brave (and don't have a problem with salt!) they might put some on their tongue.

Are they surprised at how salty they are when it's such a small amount? When we cook with salt we don't need very much of it to know it is there.

Ask the group if they can think of other ways salt makes a difference, e.g. melting ice, removing stains? It doesn't take much salt to make a difference!

In today's gospel Jesus talks to His followers about what it means to be a disciple. Some of the things Jesus says seem quite hard but He's trying to get the attention of His followers, and us today. One of the things He compares disciples to is salt! "Have salt in yourselves". Why do they think Jesus might say that?

Jesus uses images to explain things to His disciples, and to us. Jesus wants the disciples to be like salt in the world. He wants them to make a difference, to help other people and to work for a better world, even if there are only a small number of them. Even if they, and we, sometimes feel very small and insignificant.

Action:

Jesus invites us to be His disciples today, and be like salt in our world. Even if we are small, or we can only do small things, we can still follow Him and make a difference.

Through this month of Creation Time, we have been thinking about how we care for our environment, especially if we try to be followers (disciples) of Jesus. What small action can each of us take that might make a difference to our world?

Give each child a circle of paper (representing a grain of salt) and pen. Invite them to write or draw an idea of what they, or their family, can do to look after our world better.

Then ask them to stick it into the outline of the salt cellar. The wider congregation might be invited to join in too and add their ideas onto the poster.

Make sure the poster is available for the whole congregation to look at after worship.

Prayers

With thanks to the pupils of Holyrood High School Edinburgh for their contributions to this week's prayers.

Prayer of approach

Creator God

We come before You today

With open minds and loving hearts.

We thank You for the gift of Your creation

And all You have given us

But know how often we have failed

To care for and protect it.

In this Creation Time

we accept Your invitation to discipleship.

As we commit ourselves to follow You

We will strive to build a world of love, justice and peace

And be better stewards of Your creation.

Open us up to recognise all in whom You may be found today.

In the wisdom and passion of the young and old,

In the lives and energy of the many strangers who

Strive to protect Your world,

That we may work together for the common good of all,
And pass on the gift of Your creation to future generations.

We ask this in Your name.

Amen

Confession

Loving God,

as we come to the end of this Creation Time we know how much You have given us.

We come before You today

recognising the times when we have failed to acknowledge You and do our best.

You have invited us into relationship with You, and others.

For the times when we have turned away and broken the bonds between us.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

You have given us many gifts to share with one another.

For the times when we have used them without regard for others.

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

You invited us to be to be Your disciples in the world.

For the times when we have rejected Your invitation and taken our own path.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Intercession

We give thanks today for the many gifts God has given us:

for the beauty of the earth and the abundance of its creatures,

for food to nourish us and water to quench our thirst,

for the seasons that nurture us and the relationships that sustain us.

May we be good stewards of creation,

using our skills and talents for the benefit of all.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

We remember today all those whose lives are already affected by climate change, especially the poorest and most vulnerable throughout the world.

We pray that God be with them and suffuse them with the gift of hope and strength to fight for a better world.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray for our churches, here in Scotland and around the world, that as communities of faith we are active participants in work for climate justice.

We pray for those in positions of leadership, that they may use their voices to speak out on behalf of those most vulnerable to climate change, and the whole of God's creation.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

We pray for ourselves, that we may recognise the invitation to discipleship as a gift. May we open ourselves to recognising the many people and places in which God works, building relationships with all who strive to protect God's creation.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

Musical suggestions

Hymns for this week:

- CH4 465 – “Be thou my vision”
- CH4 596 – “Breathe on me breathe of God”
- CH4 543 – “Christ be our light”
- CH4 443 – “He is Lord, he is Lord”
- CH4 251 – “I the Lord of sea and sky”
- CH4 624 – “In Christ there is no east or west”

- CH4 641 – “Seek ye first the kingdom of God”
- CH4 619 – “Spirit of the living God”
- CH4502 – “Take my life, and let it be”
- CH4 533 – “Will you come and follow me”

Passing our planet on: God’s gift to us:

- CH4 137 – “All things bright and beautiful”
- CH4 724 – “A Touching Place”
- CH4 231 – “For the fruits of his creation”
- CH4 623 – “Gather us in”
- CH4 153 – “Great is thy faithfulness”
- CH5 525 – “Let there be love shared among us”
- The Song Book of the Salvation Army 605– “Lord of Heaven and earth and sea”
- CH4 212 – “Morning has broken”
- CH4 644 – “Oh Jesus, I have promised”
- CH4 530 – “One more step along the world I go”

Resources for World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation – 1/9/2018

In 2015 Pope Francis established September 1st as the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, encouraging the Catholic community around the world to pray for our common home. Now, for its fourth year, the aid agency, CAFOD, provides resources to support this day at:

<https://cafod.org.uk/News/Campaigning-news/World-Day-of-Prayer>

The Columban Missionaries also offer a range of resources at:

<http://www.columbans.co.uk/justice-peace-jpic-2/creation-time/>

Links to other websites were correct at the time of publication.

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