

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2 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 fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Creation Time 2018 – Week 1: Passing our planet on: passing on the gift of integrity.

Introduction.....	2
Song of Solomon 2:8-13	3
Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9	4
James 1:17-27	5
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23	6
Sermon ideas	7
Time with children	8
Prayers	9
Musical suggestions	12
Resources for World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation – 1/9/2018	13

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

Members of the Creation Time 2018 Writing Group:

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Callum and Emma Newton are lieutenants in the Stornoway corps of the Salvation Army. The sheer beauty of the island on which they live makes them appreciate and strive harder to do all they can to appreciate and protect God's creation. They are the first Salvation Army corps to become an eco-congregation.

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 3 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.

[Song of Solomon 2:8-13](#)

In the Song of Solomon, the author paints an idyllic portrait of earth's generous face – seasons turn as they should, rains fall on time, then ease gently as flowers and fruit and fragrance burst through. The visceral joy of spring is tangible in the text. This is the antithesis to the flood story in Genesis: “the rains are over and gone and the turtle dove is heard singing.” Don't miss the opportunity to invite listeners into their intimate place as part of creation. This text poses an important opportunity to reconnect an ever more disconnected humanity to the whole. The unity, wholeness – the integrity – of creation is celebrated in this passage. There is, by reflecting on the generous imagery in the text, an opportunity to imagine God as lover, passionate about the planet and besotted over us. The text speaks of this lover, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills, a joyful part of creation; dependent and in harmony with the earth. There is deep connection to God, the lover, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice at the world so lovingly created, yet corrupted and scarred by our over-consumption. Heartbreak must ensue, even in the face of unbreakable love.

How can we ensure that our children and our sisters and brothers across the earth continue to be embraced by the loving, dependable arms of creation? The earth is meant to turn with the seasons, new life has its day, and then hands itself back to the earth it emerged from – so do we. This insight gives the preacher a rich way to reflect with the congregation on the cycle of life and death that we are all a part of. We can argue that those yet to come are not the inheritors of earth, but the rightful owners. We have borrowed it from them. A life that embodies integrity will step on the earth so gently that it hands it back to the rightful owners of the new day in better condition than it was handed to them as theirs dawned.

[Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9](#)

'Children learn what they live', by Dorothy Law Nolte, was a poem I grew up with, framed and prominent in my father's office. He was Director of Instruction for the county schools and this was his mantra. I'm sure many of us will recognise these lines.

*"If children live with criticism,
They learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility,
They learn to fight [...]
If children live with security,
They learn to have faith in themselves and others.
If children live with friendliness,
They learn the world is a nice place in which to live.*

http://www.empowermentresources.com/info2/childrenlearn-long_version.html

The text in Deuteronomy stresses the importance of putting our actions where our words are. 'Hear', 'show', 'observe diligently'; not 'place high on a shelf, dust off occasionally.' Verse 9 reemphasises this approach: "But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life."

It is not enough to speak sound advice to our children, we must make love known to them. Passing on the gift of integrity is a full-time vocation, not a part-time job. An example that could be used is about 'policy coherence.' Christian Aid, and other international development agencies, call on governments to work on a basis of intentional 'policy coherence for development'. This ensures that their policies and practices do not undermine another. For example, in Scotland a new Climate Change bill is being considered by our Parliament this year. Scotland is on the cutting edge of climate justice: we are committed to sustainable energy and much of our domestic needs are provided through renewable energy supplies like wind farms but we can do more. As part of *Stop Climate Chaos Scotland*, Christian Aid, with others, are pushing the Scottish Government to reach for even stronger targets to deliver a cleaner, healthier, more prosperous Scotland. This should include [greener farming](#), creating a nitrogen balance sheet for Scotland by 2020: [energy efficient homes](#), so all homes have at least Energy Performance Rating C by 2025 and [cleaner transport](#), phasing out the sale of new fossil fuel cars by 2030.

Wherever the targets finally land, meeting them will take a cohesive approach: from international development and climate, to transport, housing and education. The bill will need the commitment of us all and a willingness to make changes if we are to meet strong targets. It is the same with all our words about love, justice, equality – they must be more than vocabulary. They are vocation.

This quote from Maya Angelou may resonate: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.’

How can we live out the life we want for all the world? What do we need to do now so our children learn positive, sustainable ways of living together?

[James 1:17-27](#)

First fruits. Ripe, often surprising, hints of a hopeful harvest. And they are evidence of the tilling, the planting, the worry and the work of producing something tangible. The text in James supports the need for integrity, that holistic approach to life that marries words and action, hearing and doing. We are called to be tangible signs of God’s work in the world.

The agricultural imagery can be unpacked well here. In our personal lives and in the societies we form, are there habits, policies, practices to be unearthed and weeded out, so that more positive fruit can grow? What is stifling justice, compassion, love? Invite your congregation to consider what, in their local context, could stifle goodness.

Equally it is important to widen the thinking to reflect on actions, assumptions, cultural norms and political decisions that stifle the life of the world. As we consider the deeper implications of integrity, what we do or do not do can negatively impact our global sisters and brothers. A live example is climate change, which is driven by the developed world’s love affair with a consumer-based, fossil fuel-driven lifestyle. How can we pass on the gift of an integrated world when our actions (and our refusal to make substantial changes) persist?

You might use current news to unpack the issues, to see where integrity (that unity of words and practical action) is making a positive or negative difference. Where are the first fruits growing and what nurtures them? In places where that cohesion is missing, what is the ongoing impact?

Another example can be found in Christian Aid’s partnering work on internal displacement. Globally, 65 million people are displaced through climate chaos, religious and political

oppression or conflict. That is 1 in every 113 people on the planet. Of those 65 million the vast majority, over 40 million, are internally displaced. They never cross their borders, or they spill over into neighbouring countries that are hard-pressed to cope, yet welcome them. At least 80% of internally displaced people live and work in host communities. There are extraordinary stories of compassion and collaboration. Currently, internally displaced people do not have any recognised status, and are therefore not entitled to the rights and protection of those with refugee status. Christian Aid are lobbying the UN to have that changed and asking the Prime Minister to back the move. By offering rights and recognition, a real hope is planted.

We then go back to the question – how do we pass on the gift of integrity to our children? Only by living it.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

There is a glaring injustice exposed in this text; but, because we modern readers are removed from the historical context, it is easy to miss. The convention of thoroughly washing hands and implements was a privilege of the rich. A peasant farmer or fisher, tilling the land and scraping a living, expected to pay extortionate taxes to an occupying force, could not realistically follow the strict cleanliness laws being purported here. In fact there is an irony at work, because those well-connected and wealthy enough to follow these laws gained their wealth by compromising and colluding with the powerful occupiers, taking advantage of the poor and marginalised. There was no integrity.

Jesus shines a light on the hypocrisy and sides distinctly with those being abused by the system. He calls for an integrity of words and action. In fact, he elevates what we do above what we say. Quoting them as ‘intentions’ it becomes clear to the listener that these are ‘actions’. When the ideals we pay lip service to do not have action to support them, things fall apart. It is interesting to note that ‘washing your hands’ has resonance with another story of the system letting down the most fragile. When we return to the question of how to pass on the gift of integrity to our children this text offers us a different way to consider it. Jesus says it is not what comes from outside that defiles, but what comes from inside. If we constantly ‘feed our children’ the idea that things can make them happy however, and money is a measure of success, do we stunt their potential to grow well?

Sermon ideas

Our word ‘integrity’ comes from the Latin word ‘integri’ meaning ‘whole’ or ‘sound in construction’. This state of being whole and undivided opens the thoughts for this Sunday. We cannot divide ourselves from others, our faith from action, our words from the work we do. When we try, we undermine any authenticity we have: the platform our ideals spring from becomes unyielding and sticky. If we are to pass on the gift of integrity (wholeness) we will pass that on by living, not teaching, it.

There are so many powerful images and wisdom to draw from. The quotes by Maya Angelou and Dorothy Law Nolte offer wonderfully expressive examples of the power of action marrying words. Draw on your own stories of those whose lives have transformed yours because they lived out their beliefs. Iconic examples include Dr Martin Luther King and Gandhi; equally, there are ordinary people who, every day, show us what goodness looks like. How might we use stories from the news, other sources and our own experience? These texts give us an opportunity to explore the many ways we in the church can embody justice, love and peace. It also offers the opportunity to consider the negative impact of an institution that says one thing, but does another.

As we mark Creation time across churches this September challenge your congregation to consider what passing on the gift of integrity means for us as individuals and faith communities. Encourage adults within the congregation to take one positive action that enables you all to live out faith with integrity. This might be a commitment to buy, or insist on Fairtrade products, lobby the Prime Minister for the rights of internally displaced people, or action for climate justice by walking locally, taking public transport, or switching to a green energy provider. Make sure children and young people from the congregation know what commitments have been made and encourage them to hold the adults to account: to do what they say they will do!

Finally, this excerpt from ‘Three Men in a Boat’ by Jerome K Jerome, reminds us that one of the greatest blocks to integrity, and appreciation of creation, is our tendency to fill our lives with what we think we want, rather than what we need!

“How many people, on that voyage [up the river of life], load up the boat till it is ever in danger of swamping with a store of foolish things which they think essential to the pleasure and comfort of the trip, but which are really only useless lumber[...] Throw it overboard. It makes the boat so heavy [...] you never know a moment’s freedom from anxiety and care, never gain a moment’s rest for dreamy laziness—no time to watch the windy shadows skimming lightly o’er the shallows, or the glittering sunbeams flitting in and out among the

ripples, or the great trees by the margin looking down at their own image, or the woods all green and golden.”

Time with children

Introduction:

Encourage the children/ young people to respond to the idea in the gospel of the disciples not keeping the laws. How do they feel about that? Do they think it's ever OK to ignore rules and laws?

The important message in today's gospel is the idea of actually meaning what we say, and showing it by our actions. The leaders are angry with Jesus because his followers don't follow the religious law. Jesus reminds them that the laws are there to encourage people to love God and their neighbour. When we say we are followers of Jesus, that's what is most important and any rules and laws should help us to do that.

Action:

You will need a flip chart, pens and stickers (whatever the leader decides is appropriate)

Write one statement on each page: (Below are some examples, but not a comprehensive list.)

'I love you.'

'I'll listen.'

'I'm sorry.'

'I forgive you.'

'We need to be fair.'

Ask the children/congregation: These are important things we say, but how do we show people we really mean it? Get suggestions from the children and the congregation, and write them on each page. For example:

'I love you.' – Give a hug to someone you love; call someone to tell them you love them.

'I'll listen.' – commit to dinner time talk, or make time for a cup of tea and a listen.

'We need to be fair.' – Commit to buying fair trade.

Give each person in the congregation a sticker (they may have been handed out as people entered) and ask them to write their name on it. Give them an opportunity to pledge to live out the words by taking one suggested action that week. Invite them to place their sticker beside the agreed pledge.

You might finish off by using the poem 'Children Learn What They Live'. You might get the entire congregation involved by splitting them in two and taking turns to read each verse in turn.

Prayers

Prayer of approach

V1. Christ of our hearts, this is what You said:

V2. "I am the way and the truth and the life."

V1. This is what You said:

V2. "I am the vine and the bread, "I am the light of the world."

V1. This is what You said:

V2. "I am the good shepherd and the gardener."

V1. This is what You said:

V2. "I am the resurrection and the life."

Silence

V1. Christ of our hearts, this is what You did.

V2. You forgave your enemies – You loved them even!

V1. This is what You did.

V2. You healed the sick, sat with the suffering, stood in solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized.

V1. This is what You did.

V2. You fed the hungry and satisfied the thirsty. You fed not only stomachs, but imaginations and You fired people up for change.

V1. Christ of deep, deep love, Your life married Your words and, we, Your children, were born. You embodied a new way to be, a different path to follow, You are light to guide us, food to sustain us, the giver of a life that will echo on long after we draw our last breath.

V2. Christ of our hearts, You call us to birth, but will we walk the way with You? Words are not enough, so help us. Help us to follow wherever You lead, help us to search for our purpose in Your grand scheme.

V1. Christ of our hearts, forgive us when we pay lip service to You, but follow other paths – money, power, status. Forgive us when we speak or act in ways that make You an irrelevance to our sisters and brothers, a bygone image to our children.

All: Christ of our hearts, this is what You say and show. “Love one another, forgive forever, share everything you have and do it without a second thought, give up your life and live on.” May we walk Your way.

Confession

‘Made in the image of God’,

the sacred story we share begins with that profoundly important claim.

Humankind, made in the likeness of God, male and female, called to life that resembles their maker.

And what is ‘the image of God’ if not love, justice, equality?

God who loves us into being,

how can we live ‘in Your image’ unless we share a deep and abiding commitment to each other – to cherishing the innate dignity and worth of each human person and the beloved created order?

It is all conjured from Your divine desire and imagination. Re-imagine us, God.

Put not only Your words in our mouths, but take us completely.

Take our feet and we will walk to each other.

Take our hands and we will embrace.

Take our hearts and break them, our prejudices and explode them.

When we speak Your words, may it not be with our lips only.

Amen

Intercession

Stand up and plant yourself in the spot you've found. Take a moment and be completely still. Close your eyes and feel the ground, solid beneath your feet. Feel the connection: deep earth, rich and fertile, where we all come from and will return, but life and earth and each other. What a gift.

Now look upward, and sense, the air around you, the breath of others. Stuff of life, so essential, yet far too often taken for granted.

Join hands with someone near you. Feel, the strength, the fragility, the connection, human to human, being. There are over 7 billion of us sharing this planet, with each other and God's created order. Bloom where you are planted, but share the soil of God's good earth.

Let us pray:

With feet firmly on the ground, with hands outstretched to embrace each other, with minds and spirits stretching skyward, we come.

Open the eyes of our hearts to Your vision.

May the words of our mouths, the meditation of our hearts and the movement of our very being be one with You, O God who calls us to join the integrity of Your beloved creation.

Flowers, figs, earth and sky, mountains, hills bursting with first fruit.

They are the embodiment of life.

We share their story.

May our roots go deep, plant us firmly, ground us, nourish us, yet let us stretch.

Every growing thing does: leaves and flowers lean towards the sun, faces turn skyward.

A tree is a community in itself, a system of root and stem, branches and leaves and fruit, all intricately and intimately related.

Like us – even though we often deny it.

Call us to that same integrity of creation.

One body, indivisible and inter-dependent.

Amen

Musical suggestions

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

- CH4 147 – “All creatures of our God and King”
- CH4 63– “All people that on earth do dwell”
- CH4 189 – “Be still, for the presence of the Lord”
- CH4 465 – “Be thou my vision”
- CH4 543 – “Christ be our light!”
- CH4 485 – “Dear Lord and Father of mankind”
- CH4 154 – “How great thou art!”
- CH4 626 – “Holy Spirit, truth divine”
- CH4 352 – “O for a thousand tongues to sing”
- CH4 243 – “Touch the earth lightly”

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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