

## Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

### Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 9 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 sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

*Creation Time 2018 – Week 2: Passing our planet on: passing on the gift of hope.*

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

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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 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.

### [Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23](#)

The book of Proverbs includes a collection of folk wisdom sayings of various lengths so that in some chapters the individual verses are not always related to each other. Today's lesson however, is a collection of verses that speak about the poor.

In verses 1-2 the poor are those who simply lack the resources of wealthier people. In verses 8-9 and 22-23, the poor are *dal*, a much more common word in the Torah and the Prophets, suggesting abject poverty and helplessness.

The sayings in verses 1-2 do not reject wealth or wealthy people, but they do value a person's reputation, their "name," above their wealth. The second sayings, verses 8-9, need to be read in light of verse 7: "*The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.*" The rule of the rich over the poor and the lack of ethics between debtors and the indebted in verse 7 is related to the "injustice" of verse 8. Verse 9 blesses the one who shares what they have (bread) with the poor, in opposition to the lending (implying also collecting interest) in verse 7.

The final sayings (22-23) begin with a forceful command, "*Do not rob the poor!*" Why not? "*Because they are [already] poor!*" The helpless poor, *dal*, are linked with the oppressed poor. And, for those who might persist in asking "why not?" the answer is that the Lord prosecutes the legal cases of the poor, seizing the financial assets of the abusive, wealthy defendants.

Verse 9 may be seen as the key saying within the sayings. It blesses the generous who share what they have with the poor. The generous soul here is one with "a good eye". The

generous person sees and takes note of the needs of the poor; seeing is an intrinsic part of this generosity. Significantly, the text does not claim that one does not have to be wealthy to be generous. That the generous soul “shares” rather than “gives” may suggest that the generous person does not have an abundance of wealth from which to give charity. This sharing suggests a common meal, a table to which the poor person is graciously welcomed to share the bread of the generous soul who sees and meets the need. By inviting the poor to their own table they are nourishing the dignity of the poor as well as meeting their basic needs. This is a different model of benevolence than simply donating money.

## [Psalm 146](#)

Psalm 146 opens a collection of five hallelujah psalms at the end of the book of Psalms (146-150). Each of these psalms begins and ends by encouraging everyone to “praise the LORD!” Lifelong praise through bearing witness to God’s reign is the theme of Psalm 146.

In the opening verses an individual responds to the general call to “praise the LORD” by pledging herself to praise the LORD “as long as I live” and to sing God’s praises “all my life long”. An alternate translation of vs. 2 identifies human life not only as the timeframe but also as the means through which to praise God: “I will praise the LORD *through* my life; I will sing God’s praises *through* my existence”. This translation suggests that events in a person’s own life illustrate God’s faithfulness. It also implies that the way one lives one’s life is itself an act of praise: living out God’s values of truth, justice, and responsiveness to those in need – described in vs. 5-9 – acknowledges God’s goodness.

The psalm suddenly shifts to the topic of human leaders or “nobles” (verses 3 and 4). Even the best public officials, teachers, business leaders, and social change agents are limited in their efforts to help those in trouble, not because they are evil, but because they are human and mortal.

Verses 5-9 give a vision of God as an attentive and reliable sovereign. God is the one who creates. The scope of God’s creative action is all-inclusive and the entire creation is undergirded by God’s eternal truth (vs.6). God’s action shifts from the entirety of creation to specific categories of vulnerable human beings. People who are exploited, experiencing hunger, and in prison are given top priority (vs. 7). God brings justice to those who have been economically, socially, or sexually abused for another’s advantage. Providing food for the hungry follows as a parallel to God’s granting of justice. The help provided is not abstract, but real assistance in time of the body’s distress. The third category in verse 7 includes those who are bound, whom God releases.

Healing of bodily and spiritual infirmities and restoration to wholeness follows (vs. 8). God's love of the righteous belongs in this grouping, because the righteous commit themselves to reconciliation and to restoration of relationships.

The final categories of people for whom God advocates are those who are marginalized and powerless (vs. 9). The resident alien, the orphan, and the widow are three groups of vulnerable people whom God protects and expects Israel to protect. No one who intends harm will ultimately succeed.

Psalm 146 portrays a vision of healing, restoration, and wholeness. Living in a broken world where disappointment, anger, and injustice remain all too common, we are assured that God's kingdom is different. We are emboldened to hope, and to pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The psalm concludes by acknowledging the eternal rule of Zion's God, from generation to generation.

### **James 2: 1-10 (11-13), 14-17**

Does James pose a hypothetical or actual situation to his readers?

When an elegantly-dressed man – “gold-fingered and in radiant clothing” – visits your church, is he treated as more special than the homeless beggar in filthy rags? James suspects that you give the rich visitor a more prominent place, and the fragrant vagrant a more inconspicuous place.

Such behaviour doesn't go well with what James has put forward as God's way. In chapter 1:27, he reminds readers that “religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is ... to care for orphans and widows in their distress”; by the same token, he says, “God [has] chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom” (2:5). James recognizes the temptation to favour people like ourselves, or who we wish we were, over people whose misfortune reminds us of how contingent our good fortune may be. For James this is the half-hearted discipleship that submits to desire: the desire to be comfortable, to be upwardly mobile, to experience only life's ups, and to be insulated from life's downs. By contrast, whole-hearted faithfulness to God will always require of us whole-hearted faithfulness to the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters: to orphans and widows, to our naked, hungry neighbours, to wounded and broken left-behind bystanders.

No one wants a life of poverty and hardship, but James tells us the destitute have been chosen to inherit God's kingdom.

The very common impulse to show generous hospitality to those who need it least, and to withhold that generosity from those who need it most, exemplifies James's central emphasis on integrity. There is no integrity in a faith that cosies up to privilege and turns its back on need. Faith that is not joined-up with consistent action is no faith at all.

The last paragraph of today's reading thus sums up James's point that faith involves more than affirming theological formulas, but a thorough reorientation of one's life. Faith makes a difference in us and more importantly faith makes a difference in our relations with our sisters and brothers. God has chosen needy, broken, bereft brothers and sisters as the visible embodiment of Jesus' good news among us, so faith reorders our own desires away from securing our well-being by our own efforts. We are summoned to make our friends among the poor, and to trust the provision of God who gives freely to all.

### **Mark 7: 24-37**

A tired and exhausted Jesus seeks solitude. A woman hears about Him and asks that He cast a demon out of her daughter. Though some details are sparse, others are intentionally emphasised as Mark often introduces information that changes the dynamic of the story. This happens in verse 26: "Now, the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by descent". A twist to the story, making clear its key tension.

Jesus' response is less than charitable. He dismisses and insults. Jesus uses the Greek word for "dog" in the diminutive, but this does not mean Jesus is calling her a "cute little puppy." A colloquial translation today might be, "little bitch." Jesus seems unsure of the relationship between the gentiles and the Kingdom of God, suddenly seeming reticent to extend God's kingdom to a woman and a gentile. He opts instead for an epithet.

The remarkable thing in this story is how the woman corrects Jesus. She turns His words around and uses the dog metaphor to her advantage. Jesus recognizes this immediately and dismisses the demon from her daughter.

The challenge of Mark's gospel, embodied so powerfully in this story, is to perceive a God who is active and breaking into the world. God does not conform to the norms of human institutions, be they religious, social, or political.

Putting the text in its context we might not be surprised at the ethnic tension or problematic gender dynamics emerging from an ancient patriarchal culture, but how does it speak to us today? Whose are the marginalized voices today who are speaking truth to power? Where might God be active in a way that our power structures are unable to control or domesticate?

Reading Mark's Gospel, the temptation is to move immediately to advocacy. We decide who is marginalized and provide a voice for them, we amend our lifestyles to support Fairtrade or reduce our impact on the planet. Mark tells us these actions, though good in themselves, are not enough. His gospel testifies to the utter change enacted through a real encounter with those who are marginalized or excluded.

A profound example of this is provided through the life and work of Father Joseph Wresinski. He grew up in abject poverty in France and founded the "Fourth World Movement" that seeks to eradicate poverty by bringing together people from all walks of life. His book, *Blessed are You the Poor*, seeks to uncover the radical nature of a gospel of encounter. For him, the gospel is much more than a text to be read. It is a place to experience those who have been "mutilated by extreme poverty". This means that we can only get access to what he calls an "immeasurable grace" through the poor.

Wresinski's ideas cut to the heart of Mark's observation about God's activity and the encounter of Jesus with the woman. The gospel is not just advocacy or social action. It is an encounter that offers hope and changes lives and the world.

## Sermon ideas

Barack Obama famously used the phrase, 'the audacity of hope' in a keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention: 'Hope in the face of difficulty, hope in the face of uncertainty, the audacity of hope: In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us [...] a belief in things not seen, a belief that there are better days ahead.'

A dictionary definition of 'audacity' reminds us that it can mean 'boldness or daring' especially when challenging assumptions or tackling something difficult or dangerous. It can also mean 'impudence', a lack of respect in someone's behaviour towards another person.

It was the audacity of hope which drove the Syrophenician woman to act as she did, taking every risk imaginable to save her child. A woman on the margins, powerless in the face of this teacher from Galilee, she acted with boldness and daring impudence. She challenged

Jesus on His own understanding and brought about a change which not only healed her daughter but perhaps paved the way for gentiles being brought into the family of God in the church. The importance of encounter is stressed in Mark's gospel and in the life of Joseph Wresinski. What opportunities do we take to encounter those who are different from us or on the margins so we might be transformed?

The audacity of hope grounded the ancient Hebrews' concern for the poor, the foreigner, orphan and widow we find throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, including in Proverbs with its practical advice about caring for the poor and the importance of sharing. Psalm 146 offers a vision of a new world where the audacity of hope triumphs.

It was the audacity of hope which led James to challenge his community about the way they receive people and their subsequent actions. His call is to us to reorientate our lives in service to others for the good of all.

It is the audacity of hope, Gods' gift to us, which we are called to share and proclaim for the good of the planet and all people. Hope encourages us not to give up when the temptation is to be overwhelmed by the enormity of climate change, our overuse of plastic, or our dependence on fossil fuels. It is hope that enables us to see how we can work together for the good of the earth, our 'common home'. It is hope that lets us see that each individual action to reduce our carbon footprint, to reduce plastic use or find alternative fuels contributes to the shared belief that a different world, a kingdom world, is possible.

Hope is an agent of transformation which calls us to be daring and bold and even impudent at times. Passing on the gift of hope happens between people of every generation. The hopes of older and younger generations can enthuse and inspire each other if we take time to listen: to allow our encounters to speak to our hearts and live the change we experience.

## **Time with children**

This week's theme focuses on hope, and the challenge of passing it on to the next generation.

Encourage the young people to think about how we pass on the gift of hope, and receive it from others. You might:

Play pass the parcel:

Make up a parcel and play 'passing the gift of hope.' As people take off the layers, there could be images of hope, i.e. clean water, a clean environment, medicine, the Fairtrade

symbol. The final layer could reveal a cross, or another symbol for Jesus. You might talk about James' words that faith without actions is meaningless and how we can bring hope in the world, through supporting organisations bringing clean water, protecting the environment etc.

Show the video produced by CAFOD to introduce 'Laudato Si' to primary school children:-

<https://cafod.org.uk/Education/Primary-teaching-resources/Laudato-Si-animation>

After the video talk about the things we could do to look after the planet and bring hope to our world.

Have a packet of seeds, or maybe even a sunflower head:

Encourage the children to think about how late summer is a time for collecting seeds ready to plant for next year. When we plant a seed we don't know if it will grow. It depends on many things, including getting the right amounts of water and warmth, making sure it is not overrun with weeds or dug up by animals. The seed carries the hope of the new plant within it for next year.

Ask them to think what hopes we have within us, for our world and its people. They might include reducing waste, less pollution and protecting animals and plants. Then ask them to think about what actions we can take in our homes and churches to help our hopes become real, e.g. reducing our energy use by switching things off rather than leaving them on standby, not using single use plastic bottles and planting flowers and plants in our gardens that encourage wildlife.

Encourage them to think about how they might pass their hopes on to older people in our communities, and encourage them to get involved too.

Tell the stories of people from different generations who have passed hope on to others: This might include Father Joseph Wresinski and his influence in setting up the UN International Day to Overcome Poverty on October 17<sup>th</sup> each year. More information can be found at <http://www.joseph-wresinski.org/en> and <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/>); and Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taliban, and through her campaigning for girls' education has become the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner. (More information can be found at <https://www.malala.org/>)

## Prayers

### Approach to God

Creating God, we gather this day to worship You  
and offer You our praise as we begin to see signs of the seasons changing.  
Through the warmth of the days may we be reminded of Your love for each one of us, Your children.

In the changing colours of the seasons, may we be reminded of the diversity of Your world.  
As crops ripen and prepare for harvest, may we be reminded of Your provision for us day by day.

Open our hearts and still our minds to receive Your Word to us.  
Stir our imaginations and move us to action as we pledge to pass on the gift of hope for the world through our daily living  
and in the legacy we leave for future generations.  
Amen

### Thanksgiving

Generous God, You provide us with every good thing:  
The gift of the world in which we live,  
of family and friends  
and the gifts of faith, hope, and love.  
Receive our thanks today.

For the beauty of the world in which we live: we praise You.  
For the diversity of species and the intricacy of eco-systems: we praise You.  
For the cycle of life, death and new life which we see in the changing of seasons: we praise You.

For ordinary days and special moments spent with family and friends: we thank You.  
For those we see every day and those we keep in touch with by phone or over the internet: we thank You.  
For the love of family and friends, which sustains and supports us and through which we experience Your love for us: we thank You.

For all who have nurtured us on our journey and passed on the gift of faith: we praise You.  
For all who have encouraged us to believe a different way is possible and passed on the gift of hope: we praise You.

For all who have shown us compassion and passed on the gift of love: we praise You.

### **Confession**

Merciful God,

we acknowledge that there are times when we have fallen short of how we would wish to live,

we have failed to live as the people You would have us be.

For the times we have forgotten that this world is Yours and we have used it without proper regard for our sisters and brothers and the earth itself.

Forgive us.

For the times we have taken our family and friends for granted, when we have put ourselves first and disregarded their needs.

Forgive us.

For the times we have failed to recognise the gifts of faith, hope and love, and been too weak and fearful in our discipleship.

Forgive us.

God whose mercy knows no limits and whose love extends beyond time and space, forgive us for our failings and draw us back to You once again.

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen.

### **Intercession**

God of all hopefulness, we bring before You our concerns for the world and her people.

Gracious God, we turn to You,

### **For You are the source of our hope and the creator of the Kingdom.**

We pray for parents around the world who reach out in hope for their children.

Bless them with the audacity of hope:

when they struggle to provide food for their families;

when they have to choose which child they can afford to send to school;

when they challenge boundaries and perceptions to provide for their children's needs.

Gracious God, we turn to You,

### **For You are the source of our hope and the creator of the Kingdom.**

We pray for those who find themselves on the margins of their societies. Bless them with the audacity of hope:

that they might confront centres of power with the experience of life on the margins;  
that they might be allowed to contribute to the welfare of society;  
that we may all be enriched by the insights and wisdom they bring to our communities.

Gracious God, we turn to You,

**For You are the source of our hope and the creator of the Kingdom.**

We pray for our common home and all who seek to ensure its wellbeing.

Bless them with the audacity of hope:

that all nations of the world will work together for the common good of each person and our planet;  
that conservation will enable habitats to flourish while meeting the needs of local communities;  
that we each understand the impact we have upon the earth and adjust our lifestyle accordingly.

Gracious God, we turn to You,

**For You are the source of our hope and the creator of the Kingdom.**

We pray for ourselves,

Disturb us and disquiet us with the audacity of hope.

Challenge us to grasp a vision of Your new world and motivate us to act to birth it into being.

Enable us to pass on the gift of hope, so others are empowered to continue the journey of faith.

Gracious God, we turn to You,

**For You are the source of our hope and the creator of the Kingdom.**

## Musical suggestions

Hymns for this week:

- CH4 192 –“All my hope on God is founded”
- CH4 166 –“Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all”
- CH4 252 –“As a fire is meant for burning”
- CH4 685 –“For everyone born a place at the table”
- CH4 663 –“As we proclaim your death” – bread of life, hope for the world
- CH4257 –“Come bringing hope into a world of fear” –singing we gladly worship the Lord together
- CH4 275 Come now, O Prince of Peace”

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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