

Exodus 3:1-15  
Romans 12:9-21  
Matthew 16:21-28



# WEEK 1

## Let Love Be Genuine

Prophet Amos cries out: *“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”* (Amos 5: 24) and so we are called to join the river of justice and peace, to take up climate and ecological justice, and to speak out with and for communities most impacted by climate injustice and the loss of biodiversity.

As the people of God, we must work together on behalf of all Creation, as part of that mighty river of peace and justice.<sup>1</sup>

### Preparation

**You may like to prepare for this week’s study by engaging with the following resources:**

[SOC 2023 Launch](#)<sup>2</sup>

[Black Summer 2020](#)<sup>3</sup>

[Animals Impacted by Bushfires](#)<sup>4</sup>

[Maui Wildfires](#)<sup>5</sup>

[TED Talk – Why Wildfires Have Gotten Worse.](#)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Season of Creation (Official Website) 2023)

<sup>2</sup> (Season of Creation (Official Website) 2023)

<sup>3</sup> (Insider Jul 21, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> (New WWF Report: 3 Billion Animals Impacts by Australia's Bushfire Crisis 28 July 2020)

<sup>5</sup> (Salahieh 2023)

<sup>6</sup> (Hessburg 2017)

# Opening Prayer

## SEASON OF CREATION 2023 PRAYER

Creator of All,  
From your communion of love life sprung forth like a mighty river and the whole cosmos came into being.

On this Earth of overflowing love, the Word was made flesh and went forth with the life-giving waters proclaiming peace and justice for all creation.

You called human beings to till and keep your garden. You placed us into right relationship with each creature, but we failed to listen to the cries of the Earth and the cries of the most vulnerable. We broke with the flowing communion of love and sinned against you by not safeguarding the conditions for life.

We lament the loss of our fellow species and their habitats, we grieve the loss of human cultures, along with the lives and livelihoods that have been displaced or perished, and we ache at the sight of an economy of death, war and violence that we have inflicted on ourselves and on the Earth.

Open our ears to your creative, reconciling and sustaining Word that calls to us through the book of Scripture and the book of creation. Bless us once again with your life-giving waters so that the Creator Spirit may let justice and peace flow in our hearts and overflow into all creation.

Open our hearts to receive the living waters of God's justice and peace, and to share it with our suffering brothers and sisters, all creatures around us, and all creation.

Bless us to walk together with all people of good will so that the many streams of the living waters of God's justice and peace may become a mighty river all over the Earth.

In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation,  
Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> (Africa 2023, vi)

# Reading

## Read Exodus 3:1-15

1. *What's the part Creation plays out in this story?*
2. *What is and isn't "Creation"? (Hint - who made you?).*
3. *Why do some hymns and prayers separate 'heaven and earth' as if one or the other were not 'Creation'?*

### Creation VS Nature

Why do biblical scholars, more often than not, use the term creation rather than nature? There are a number of reasons for such usage, the most important perhaps is that for Christians who believe that God is a divine Creator – drawing particularly on the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Speech about creation and the idea that the earth is a gift of God makes a great deal of sense. Nature, on the other hand, has multiple meanings but is most commonly thought of as the part of the world that is not human and can be understood through knowledge arising from natural sciences. Those outside the Christian community would not readily appreciate a presupposed understanding of the world as that created by God. Of course, many authors will deliberately bridge both discussions. One way to understand this is that there are two sides to the same coin, a reading of the natural world as nature and a reading of a divine gift or creation. This makes scientific and theological understanding of the natural world around us fully compatible and therefore undercuts the supposition that creation is opposed to scientific ways of knowing the world.<sup>8</sup>

The Call of Moses should ring many bells for busy people shackled to Business-as-Usual, and those who have withdrawn from areas of conflict where they had a part to play, but things got too much, perhaps because they were isolated and alone. But even 'beyond the wilderness,' God speaks and calls.

*In our congregation, let us think, what gifts do we have to use when faced with ecological problems that emerge in the world around us?*

*What are you good at?*

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<sup>8</sup> (Deane-Driummond 2017, 24)

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***How can you use that?***<sup>9</sup>

Little is made explicit, in the narrative, of Moses' unique qualifications as a bridge between the cultures of oppressors and oppressed, but do we need to be told in so many words that he's one for the job? Perhaps. Even God sometimes has to state the obvious. In this reading, Moses could have reacted a touch more conscientiously to his reaction to seeing the burning bush. He could have had the mindset and thought, "Never mind that bush - I've got the sheep to care for!"<sup>10</sup>

***How blinkered and constrained are we by daily tasks and duties - oblivious of the warning signs and wonders around us?***

Apparent conflicts of obligation need further attention. We are told that no "Voice" was heard, no words pronounced *until* it was clear that Moses had taken some notice. Maybe we shut it out until we feel either we have 'permission' or we're so far away ("beyond the wilderness") that we're free to respond. The God of the Exodus is almighty, but he resolutely refuses to perform every detail of the response to injustice and human suffering without human involvement. Liberation is God's gift, but not given without participation.<sup>11</sup>

We note that the bush, though not consumed, is blazing. It's not "fireproof" and, indeed, is on that borderline of distress where intervention might make a difference; it seems it's "too late", though the curiosity, the wonder, is that contrary to expectations, it's not -yet- burned up.

In that sense, the Bush is a sign of hope beyond hope!

***However, when we reflect on our forever-changing climate in Australia, do we take note of what creation is saying to us?***

***Are we paying attention to what the burning bush is telling us, or are we going on with business as usual?***

This is a sign for us as the key - and frightening - threshold of 1.5 degrees of Global Warming edges closer this year and next with regular global climate fluctuations. The medium of God's communication is a living thing in distress: Creation is God's mouthpiece, and indeed, although Moses is ordered to 'come

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<sup>9</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>10</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>11</sup> (Scotland 2023)

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no closer'; nonetheless, the holiness of the Earth is respected in the removal of protective layers from his feet, is to closer, contact with the holiness of the Earth.

*What makes a particular spot “holier” than any other?*

*Does holiness simply happen? Or is it recognised wherever God is encountered?*

*Is there an antidote to injustice?*

*Are we not called to live in a fruitful relationship within a God-given homeland?*

*Do we not share a Common Home, a shared habitat: God’s Earth?<sup>12</sup>*

[Scientific Reports – Air Pollution 2019-20 Australian Bushfires](#)

[Australia’s Animals and The Threat of Bushfires](#)

**Read Romans 12:9-21 - NRSV**

There are a lot of words of comfort in this passage – that a life lived well is well lived- but also a few traps we need to step in rather than skip over. Yes, there is such a thing as Christian competitiveness. Don’t shy away from it: and Christian craftiness, appropriate boastfulness (of what God has done). As with most gifts, it’s what you do with it and whom it benefits.<sup>13</sup>

We might recall the saying dubiously attributed to Nelson Mandela, who may also have quoted it “There is no passion to be found playing small - in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.” When your church progresses with a net-zero programme, share the credit and the benefits, but don’t minimise the achievement, which adds to your wider community.<sup>14</sup>

We should avoid the toxicity of arrogance and seek the graciousness of being a church of whom our society and local community can be rightly proud. However, the values of that society may also need loving challenges and attention. Not least, any remnants of vengefulness.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>13</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>14</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>15</sup> (Scotland 2023)

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In Australia, we inevitably set emissions on targets. (Australian Emissions Targets 2021-2030)<sup>16</sup> Hopefully, with this information, it will educate and persuade congregations to strive to support measures towards net-zero aspirations. Still, encouragement is given in Romans 12, which never suggests doing others down or trampling on the weak.<sup>17</sup>

### **Read Matthew 16:21-28 - NRSV**

**A caution: The idiom: the language chosen in some translations can add alarm -or even harm -to this most scarifying presentation of discipleship. To ‘deny’ the self that God gave you is not a healthy option, either spiritually or for mental health. But to renounce ‘self’ as a priority can be liberating, freeing us to be a blessing to others and ourselves.<sup>18</sup>**

Jesus’ speech on the prospect of the cross insists that such things are far from trivial. Peter does not ‘get’ the seriousness of the path Jesus is called to, and thus the cost of any discouragement, even well-meaning, of that transition. How many kindly, prudent - reasons have you heard, even within your congregation, to postpone action, investment, or even the slightest adjustments to worship, prayer, language and liturgy in those times and places which most define ‘church’ for you? Not just in the *Season of Creation/ Creation Time*, but Harvest, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost - and *this* Sunday! Peter discovers here that his friend Jesus is someone just a bit different from what he had understood.<sup>19</sup>

***Do we want our friendship with Christ to survive such a realisation?***

***What is the world, or the church, we’re trying to ‘gain’ or ‘preserve’ by our current attitudes and lifestyles?***

***Whom do we trust to hold our hand?***

***And whom can we encourage to give us leadership for Just transition and care of Creation by supporting them in that difficult task?<sup>20</sup>***

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<sup>16</sup> (Australian 2022)

<sup>17</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>18</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>19</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>20</sup> (Scotland 2023)

# Message

Listen again to Sunday's message from the service. Note what stands out for you this time.

# Reflection

<sup>21</sup>

These questions can be a guide to encourage the group to engage with the Bible Passages and/or the Sermon from the previous Sunday as well as the other material suggested as part of the preparation. Some groups may wish to revisit this material together as time allows.

Reflecting Inwards:

1. How does this passage speak to your life?
2. Did you discover something new in reading it again?
3. Did it raise any questions you would like an answer to?

Reflecting Outwards:

1. Should we explore how to give greater attention to biblical stories that embrace relationships between God, humanity, and creation rather than just focusing on human history?
2. Do we give consider other creatures other than humans to be integral parts of creation?
3. When we reread the ministry of Jesus, can we see how he pays attention to the natural world around him?<sup>22</sup>

Gathering of wisdom

1. What new thing have you learned through participating in this Study?
2. How might you see this learning in your life?

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<sup>21</sup> (Stalley n.d.)

<sup>22</sup> (Deane-Driummond 2017)

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# Closing Prayer

Lord God of all creation, may the richness and beauty of the natural world never cease to uplift and sustain us. May we constantly be aware of how our actions affect the environment and strive to create a fairer and more sustainable world. May we always be grateful for nature's gifts, and may we continuously work to preserve and cherish them. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> (Prayers for creation and nature March 17, 2023)



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Romans 12:9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

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