

Exodus 12:1-14  
Psalm 149  
Romans 13:1-10  
Matthew 18:10-20  
[Ezekiel 33:7-11; Psalm 119:33-40]



# WEEK 2

## Changing Minds and Hearts

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

[Great Barrier Reef Escapes ‘in danger’ list for now. – ABC National](#)

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

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# 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>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> (Africa 2023)

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# Reading

## **Read Exodus 12:1-14 - NRSV**

This passage's meticulous detail underlines the seriousness with which a festival of liberation can be celebrated with holy urgency.

*But is it 'set in stone'?*

*Is there any suggestion that there are no opportunities for change as time and contexts change?*

*The Seven Words That Kill the Church are, "But we've always done it this way!" "Always" is a lightweight word all too easily applied to what we've done for a year or two or, in some cases, even longer! But it carries 'clout'. Its open endlessness sometimes masks the habit of most Bible writing thinking which instead is in terms of finite successive *ages*. We certainly gain spiritual strength from observing traditions, high days, and holidays. Our differing Christian traditions vary in the number and wholeheartedness of the festivals we choose to observe, through the Lord's Day, even when through the restriction and isolation of lockdown during Covid we found ways to worship and be in fellowship with each other. It serves as a reminder that even the most ardent minimalists among us of the gift of ritual observance, and how it shapes both our identity and spiritual unity as God's People of all places and times.<sup>3</sup>*

*Being with? Relationship? Stewardship?*

*Being with God = Being with Creation?*

It's worth looking into the language used. In Hebrew, 'perpetuity' is related to 'salt': the mineral used primarily to preserve food until it's needed for nourishment. Preservation is a pointless aim in itself if what is being preserved is not life giving.

*How, in crisis, do we activate the benefit of fellowship with those whom God's faithfulness led to freedom?*

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<sup>3</sup> (Scotland 2023)

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***Who and which creatures sharing our ‘Common Home’ can share that freedom?<sup>4</sup>***

This passage contains countless culturally and spiritually powerful specifications, some of which we can today repurpose and recycle to feed our own congregations. Others have, for the time being, receded in significance, though nothing in Scripture needs to be discarded like single-use plastic. Keep them in reserve, like salted food.<sup>5</sup>

***What, then, of the treasures of scripture, its interpretation, and tradition, will today strengthen the resolve, enrich the faith, and multiply the joy of followers of Christ in the Climate Crisis?<sup>6</sup>***

**Read Psalm 149 - NRSV**

It isn't easy to take this Psalm as a whole. Few have done so. But it begins well, if quirkily: a three-thousand-year-old song telling us to sing new songs. Or perhaps to recycle and repurpose our praise of God 'ever old and ever new' in conditions that have changed since we first sang a given hymn or used a written prayer or opening to worship.

***What makes faithfulness ‘as good as new’?<sup>7</sup>***

The affirmation of exuberant praise and the benefits of 'victory' not just to the leaders but to the 'poor' is wholesome, perhaps even innocent and delightful. Or you could assertively choose to read it that way.<sup>8</sup>

Then verses 5 or 6 get nasty: verses that bluntly remind us how faith can be subjugated to the unforgiving and vengeful. These are verses where we need the corrective of Jesus ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*** [Matt 5:17 NRSV]. An authoritative challenge to accepted values is accepted only because of their dominance.

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<sup>4</sup> (Scotland 2023)

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

<sup>6</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>7</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>8</sup> (Scotland 2023)

Exodus 12:1-14

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[Ezekiel 33:7-11; Psalm 119:33-40]

***Can we experience the uplift of ‘triumph’ without it being ‘triumph over’ fellow creatures?<sup>9</sup>***

So to feed a congregation, do we need to take the advice of the first verses: (cf. Taizé “Confitemini Domino”), sing out exuberantly the global theme of the Season of Creation, “letting love and justice flow,” and apply it to this challenging ancient text by leaving behind the vengefulness of the second half... whilst being mindful both of that it’s there and of your reasons for so doing.<sup>10</sup>

**Read Ezekiel 33:7-11 - NRSV**

***Is this a message of the practical generosity of a stern God?***

The repetitiveness of God’s addresses to Ezekiel leaves no room for misunderstanding: it’s as if there are not inherently and incorrigibly wicked or righteous folk, but only as defined by their current conduct. This is a source of hope for those who thought themselves beyond hope, destroying the complacency of merely strategic righteousness.

In a time when we’ve certainly passed some tipping points and when global heating and sea-level rise are firmly locked in, this gives us pause for thought, not - unrealistically- about simply reversing or “*fixing*” these things, but instead as to how both at a local and global level we support adaptation and mitigation of these challenges. After all, the death sentence pronounced by God is no more a foregone conclusion than the immunity conferred by provisional righteousness. We should be clear that the most likely human casualties of continued global use of fossil fuels do not live in the most polluting cultures, so the cause-and-effect model this passage seems to be based on does not apply without reservation. But far less does any claim that “we just have to continue this way”. The passage makes complete sense, however, at the point that we finally trust, believe and take seriously the spiritual fact of Galatians 3:28 that... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all ... are one in Christ Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

**Read Psalm 119:33-40 - NRSV**

Seek the good! A short extract from the longest Psalm. 8 of 176 verses. All about the love of the Word of God. Not only knowledge but also wisdom/understanding is necessary for any meaningful faithfulness, loyalty or

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

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

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

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obedience to God. And both ‘hearts and minds’ are intentionally engaged in the suit of justice in response to the love of God.<sup>12</sup>

The Psalmist is conscious of their own need for growth and change, as of the scope for the wasteful, pointless exercise of their gifts; for their need to be fed and nurtured, though not at the cost to others of “unjust gain”, which is offered as a measure of those aims to which what God’s decrees cannot be twisted or enlisted.<sup>13</sup>

Most mainstream churches are in a process of reflecting on the ‘legacies of slavery’. Asking the hard questions of how our church's prosperity has built on the most apparent and obscene wholesale racial abuse, the abolition of which was further delayed by what then seemed economic prudence and common sense.

As the historian Henry Reynold writes:

Twenty thousand blacks were killed before federation. Their burial mound stands out as a landmark of awesome size on the peaceful plains of colonial history. If the bodies had been white, our histories would be heavy with their story, a forest of monuments would celebrate their sacrifice.....In parts of our continent, the Aboriginal death toll overshadows even that of the overseas wars of the twentieth century. About 5000 Europeans from Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn died in the five wars between the outbreak of the Boer War and the end of the Vietnam engagement. But in a similar period --- say the 70 years between the first settlement in North Queensland in 1861 and the early 1930s as many as 10000 blacks were killed in skirmishes with the Europeans in north Australia (1989, p 22)<sup>14</sup>

Experience shows that slavery contaminates our lives, communities, and businesses. There have been cases of slavery in this country... Australians are also exposed through tourism and trade with countries where many millions are trapped into forced labour, servitude and slavery..... between 18 million and 22

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

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

<sup>14</sup> (Rainbow Spirit Theology 2007)

Exodus 12:1-14

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[Ezekiel 33:7-11; Psalm 119:33-40]

million people were trapped in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). Such people seem to be hidden in local communities.<sup>15</sup>

We can see similar strategies at work, at a still more significant cost to fellow creatures and the web of life on which we depend daily. The unfashionable idea of ‘fear of God’ is included in the context of God’s promises. A warning by God is an expression of love.

<https://www.cwmission.org/programmes/the-onesimus-project/>

<https://anglicanfocus.org.au/2020/07/24/why-care-about-slavery/>

<https://atfdocumentary.vhx.tv/>

### **Romans 13:8-14 - NRSV**

*8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet’; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. 11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; 13 let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

These are words of moral comfort: stuff we *imagine* we don’t kick hard against in any case. However, the attitudes which govern daily, and national life have ways of evading the most obvious obligations that arise in the pursuit of Love as the Law. The constraints of indebtedness, in particular, grossly distort the relationship between one worshipper and another. In local church situations, small emergency grants work better than small informal loans, which recipients might struggle to pay back which can become toxic to friendship, if mutual benefit happens without calculation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> (Hpwel 2020)

<sup>16</sup> (Scotland 2023)

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This can also apply between nations who brought home to us by the ‘Drop the Debt’ movement around the turn of the century. With limited impact, we called on the leadership of rich nations and huge institutions to obey the law of love. But what if the cycle of indebtedness were turned on its head? - as is the case with the global movement for ‘Loss and Damage’, which made some moral progress at COP28. [<https://unfccc.int/cop28>]. The United Nations voted with amazing unanimity to adopt a resolution led by the tiny Pacific state of Vanuatu to ask the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on states’ climate change obligations.

The graciousness we’re looking for can arise from the recognition that investment to migrate against the damage already in progress is in the interest of those recognising their responsibility. Then there’s the responsibility of our species to cultivate friendship with the Earth and all its creatures, whose mutual dependence was known to some Bible writers but which we’re just beginning to rediscover and respect. This Epistle observes and speaks loudly to our age: it’s about - *or long past* time. The urgency of global transition means no one is exempt though conditions will differ.<sup>17</sup>

### **Read Matthew 18:15-20 - NRSV**

This is another extremely dense text with several huge and controversial statements. To start with, the sin against ‘*me*’: is not to be ignored, both because they might do it to someone else less able to let it be and because the ‘sinner’ is doing themselves and the community harm.

This response is one primarily out of love for the ‘sinner’, working hard to avoid humiliation by keeping it as quiet as possible, giving the benefit of the doubt that they might be convinced by the witnesses before finally going public. Though long-term, it benefits the community too. But even then, in a Christian Community, ‘a gentile or a tax collector is not without the option of conversion, welcome and inclusion.

The point is that the obedient followers recognise the damage that continues to be done if ‘sin’ goes *unchallenged*.

What is becoming clearer about this: is that it is now well beyond reasonable doubt that human activity - *and in particular, the burning of fossil fuels within*

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



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*our lifetimes* -is the direct principal cause of the measurable increase in extreme weather, the heating and acidification of the oceans, the melting of glaciers and the loss of crucial habitat. It is anything but loving and polite to step back as if denial of this were mere ‘opinion’. We’re also at the stage where the attribution of the influence of climate change on particular events is no longer a mystery, with progress on the attribution even of ‘slow onset’ climatic changes. There are so many ways to describe a tapestry of crisis.... but the point was well-made by New Zealand’s climate minister after a disastrous cyclone. So too, congregations, whilst going out of their way to “welcome all” and start with them where they may be, cannot be seen as a sanctuary for attitudes harmful not only to others but ultimately to those who hold them. If other groups use your premises, are they asked to use fairly traded goods and recycle whilst they are your ‘guests’, even if they pay?<sup>18</sup>

And yet, those who have believed what is sometimes very cleverly phrased material (often financed by fossil fuel interests, with retired academics selling their prestige) are our special concern: the crisis calls us - following the special care that Jesus on occasion devoted to ‘gentiles and tax collectors- to do what we can to bring on board every one of goodwill.<sup>19</sup>

The definition of “sin”, as something - far from trivial - which truly harms the Earth, and our relationship with God, may be useful here, as, in many Communion settings, Jesus as the “Lamb of God” who deals with it!<sup>20</sup>

As a Church congregation we need to be open to be curious and engage with evidence of science. To openly listen to and our sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and elsewhere. To have our eyes and ears open to see and to hear the cries of wildlife as their populations around the world decline. We need with urgency to speak with the authority that is endorsed and sanctioned by the Church. We need to welcome them, befriend them. We need join together and make a positive and transformational reality.<sup>21</sup>

It’s difficult not to compare this with attitudes like racism or climate denial (including the idea that the turmoil we’re seeing is ‘simply natural’ and not caused by human activity). Both are harmful to all, both stupidly and stubbornly flying in the face of what is beyond a reasonable doubt - and both are deeply ingrained in our culture in many and various ways. Climate denial is not ‘a

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

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

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

<sup>21</sup> (Scotland 2023)

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalms 149

Romans 13:1-10

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[Ezekiel 33:7-11; Psalm 119:33-40]

matter of opinion' that polite Christians can happily ignore. Such 'politeness' is collusion, and Matthew 18 does not suggest that the faithful disciple joins the sinful one in sin or even any form of revenge.<sup>22</sup>

In our time, that is a choice to be on the side of the polluter, of gross and global injustice, a choice to 'walk by on the other side' and disregard Lazarus on our doorstep. And yet, Christ challenges his community to find ways of loving, healing, and changing the mind of those who persist in what truly harms God's world. And, of course, the reputation of the Church, the confidence folk have in us.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, a creation-aware reading of "whatever you bind" makes more than merely a spiritual sense. Creation, Heaven-and-Earth/Sky-and-Soil is the one unified Creation of One God. Our decisions and actions "bind" it all. When we remember the skyness of 'heaven', then the state of the climate is also the condition of 'Heaven'. It's that serious.

This passage reminds us that our actions and lifestyles have truly global importance - as also do small, faithful prayerful initiatives. The "two-or-three." The God of Heaven and Earth is not fussy about scale when we're choosing Christ's direction.<sup>24</sup>

[https://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/workstreams/loss\\_and\\_damage/application/pdf/attributingextremeevents.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/workstreams/loss_and_damage/application/pdf/attributingextremeevents.pdf)

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/14/new-zealand-minister-delivers-furious-speech-about-lost-decades-spent-bickering-over-climate-crisis>

<https://unfccc.int/news/united-in-science-we-are-heading-in-the-wrong-direction>

## Message

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

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<sup>22</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>23</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>24</sup> (Scotland 2023)

Exodus 12:1-14  
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# Reflection

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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>26</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>25</sup> (Stalley n.d.)

<sup>26</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>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> (Prayers for creation and nature March 17, 2023)

Exodus 12:1-14  
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Voices **Agnus Dei**  
David Coleman Palm Sunday Iona Abbey 2019 Pat Livingstone

$\text{♩} = 45$  Gently

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the piano introduction in 12/8 time, marked *p* (piano), with the tempo instruction  $\text{♩} = 45$  Gently. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Lamb of God" in two measures. The second system continues the piano accompaniment and includes the lyrics: "You take a - way what tru - ly harms the earth. Show - com - pass - ion on us Send - your peace." The third system concludes with the lyrics "Lamb of God" and "Send your peace." The piano accompaniment remains consistent throughout, providing a gentle and steady accompaniment for the vocal lines.

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Exodus 12:1-14

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