

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]



## WEEK 3

# No Refuge for the Rich

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

[Australian carbon emissions<sup>2</sup>](#);  
[Climate Change Impacts in Developing Countries.<sup>3</sup>](#)  
[Australian security and climate change – ABC radio.<sup>4</sup>](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> (Scotland 2023)

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

<sup>3</sup> (United Nations Climate Change 2023)

<sup>4</sup> (Barclay 2022)

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

# 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>5</sup>

---

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

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

# Reading

## **Read Exodus 14:19-31 - NRSV**

A thrilling and yet terrifying passage, with God portrayed as in direct lordship over and control of the elements. The whole narrative of the Plagues and the Exodus brutally affirms the connection we finally once more see so clearly: human injustice and environmental disruption. But there's the other side of the coin: the remedy and intervention God chooses involves those who hear God's word, who act and play their part. Moses' outstretched (created) hand is as much part of the event as the water that overwhelms the Egyptians.<sup>6</sup>

Though we're also left with fear and trust but not yet feeling God's love, Creation, and working with God, is seen to hold injustice to account.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Why should we expect it to be otherwise?***

It can sometimes be challenging to read the Old Testament and mentally keep separate the personalities of natural forces and their collaboration with God in the quest for justice. The Red Sea incident adds the instance of God in place of human intervention and agency alongside the power of the wind and the waves. In the drama of this defining story, injustice and oppression make humans (in this case, Egyptians) enemies of the Earth on whom we depend.<sup>8</sup>

The outcome, in terms of those who suffer, differs from our own recent experiences where the absence of 'climate justice' is what our young protesters' demand 'now'. Polluters seldom pay for the predicament of the poor.<sup>9</sup>

### ***How does that make you feel?***

### ***Will it influence your prayer, preaching, and decisions in daily life?***

---

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

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

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

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

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

## **Read Psalm 114**

This poetic psalm has awe-inspiring personalities of land and seascape that are addressed *without* awe, serving them in a perspective of the might of God, whose transforming power is sovereign over all, as evidenced by the stories of the Exodus.<sup>10</sup>

*Does it make sense to ‘look down’ on the communities and personalities of Earth because we feel blessed by God?*

*Should we worry, that God might be offended by our appreciation of what God has so wonderfully made?*

*Is there complacency here?*

*If so, does that mean we’re the ones who can look on from a safe distance?*

*If the mountains and the seas fear and respect God, are we not instead in solidarity with them and called, likewise, to act justly?*

This Psalmist is God’s ‘number one fan’; however, perhaps he is also just slightly nervous and fearful for, somewhat disrespectfully, the mighty community of Creation is addressed from that perspective, with national pride hitching onto the power of Israel’s special relationship with a universal God.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps there’s something here of the polemic against other faiths who worshipped the power of ‘creation rather than the creator’ [cf Romans 1:25], which may be seized on as a last remaining defence against having to take seriously the connection between the environmental crisis and human injustice. That connection made sense to prophets like Jeremiah... and Isaiah, for whom the water cycle and the Word of God were to be mentioned so closely [Isaiah 55:10].<sup>12</sup>

To worship God never consistently implies *despising* what God creates and sustains. Indeed, it’s right to experience awe, wonder and love for landscapes

---

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

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

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

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

and fellow creatures who, by the gift of God, share our global habitat, sharing even the fear that the Psalmist in verse 7 imputes to the Earth.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus' calming of the wind and waves in person suggests something other than an impersonal and inevitably innocent nature to be left alone at all costs. The traditional doctrines about the disordered nature of Nature as we encounter "it" do not necessarily conflict with what God "saw was good". [cf Genesis 1]<sup>14</sup>

And yet, to that, we now have to add, in climate crisis more than ever, God's word to humanity: 'Cursed is the Earth because of you'. [cf Genesis 3:17] ..and perhaps, as a follow-up question: "***So what are you going to do about it?***" We have more to learn about God from the observable facts of our unity and identity with a good but damaged Creation than the twisted illusion of our separation and superiority.<sup>15</sup>

***How can we seek humanity's unified blessing and healing and, therefore, of Creation of which we are not other?***

### **Read Genesis 50:15-21**

On the surface, this concluding story of the Joseph narrative seems more exclusively about human-to-human interaction than the other Lectionary passages this Season. Still, it's precious to present forgiveness as a practical win-win outcome rather than a grudging and costly one. In the climate crisis, there's much to forgive. But forgiveness is in the hands of those who have been wronged. Reconciliation, alongside genuine change, does not require us to waste time with recriminations, although responsibility does not thereby evaporate. Jesus' maxim: 'From whom much is given, much will be required [Luke 12:48] can vary in application.<sup>16</sup>

Much has been *taken* from Joseph's brothers. Even in mainland Europe, the USA and Australia, the recent exacerbation of nature's extremes have taken livelihoods and homes from many. Aid to those in immediate need has to be a priority, though concern for future harm done by continued unsustainable living comes close. Consider the concept of 'Loss and Damage': the recognition of the injury which is now beyond a reasonable doubt and has been caused by

---

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

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

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

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

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

polluters of the Global North to the people, nations and ecosystems which have done the *least* damage to the balance of the climate.<sup>17</sup>

It's relatively easy for *Joseph* to step back from enjoying wealth and privilege and to acknowledge God's guiding hand in all that has happened. If, at this end of the story, we admire his wise graciousness, then any goodwill we may encounter in sisters and brothers from (amongst others) Pacific communities facing salt-water inundation should command our highest esteem.<sup>18</sup>

We could also approach this by considering our relationship and friendship as a human species with the Earth, with whom, within our lifetimes, we could have been seen as at war, though never other than dependent for food, air, water and more.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, 'The *Blame Game*' is toxic for all concerned. But we'll be condemned to it if responsibility is not owned.<sup>20</sup>

### **Read Romans 14:1-12**

"In Australia, agriculture is responsible for 13 per cent of its national total greenhouse gas emissions (Australian Government Climate Change Authority)<sup>21</sup>, while farmers are at the forefront of feeling the impacts of a warming climate. Yet land use is also our primary tool to absorb some of the carbon in the atmosphere and produce renewable energy. How we organise this while ensuring our biodiversity and rural communities are protected and supported is vitally important for our future." Instead of concluding that 'the weak eat only vegetables,' Paul might have looked back to the four conscientious vegans in Daniel who "looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food." [Daniel 1:15]. John the Baptist was also exemplary, with his low-carbon, high-protein diet of 'locusts and wild honey'. Paul elsewhere recognised, "when I am weak, then I am strong". Those we might initially see as 'weak' (or woke?) may have the inner strength to let their vulnerability be seen.<sup>22</sup>

---

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

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

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

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

<sup>21</sup>

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

Exodus 14:19-31

Psalms 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18

Romans 14:1-14

Matthew 18:21-35

[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

There's a broad consensus that for human beings to eat *less* meat - especially of captive and factory-farmed ruminants who produce vast amounts of methane - would significantly contribute to reducing emissions - and possibly to our health, if well-managed. Of course, it's not quite that simple: grazing animals also condition the soil.<sup>23</sup>

In conversations about diet, goodwill and wisdom are needed, as well as a recognition by all that our current situation is truly unsustainable and that those most immediately and directly affected by the urgent project of transition need to be supported rather than blamed for what they have inherited. Accountability at this level is something every individual should be allowed to do.

What is dangerous about the consumer identity is that a consumer will rarely ask questions about the supply chain leading up to the transaction. His concern is getting the most out of the lowest-priced product. In fact, the clients prefer to maintain their traditional role of the ignorant buyer; they want to be invisible, anonymous, and free of any culpability. Assuming a "customer" identity is morally evasive because consumers do not feel responsible for the journey of the product. They do not ask, "Who collected the raw materials" or "Who put the pieces together?" or "How was the product transported to the shop?" It is the responsibility of the seller to worry about all this.

Myrto Theocharous – Becoming a Refugee (2016)<sup>24</sup>

The threat and the fact of locked-in changes are high as all-encompassing as the love of God, which sees us through. God's love for all Creation, to which the Church is called to be Good News.<sup>25</sup>

### **Read Matthew 18:21-35**

***Is it pastorally appropriate to soften the 'Gothically' stern warning at the end of this passage?***

Perhaps. When this passage was first told, slavery was widespread and unquestioned as a bedrock of the economy, though someone operating with that astronomical level of economic responsibility, ten thousand talents is a little

---

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

<sup>24</sup> (Richter 2020, 29)

<sup>25</sup> (Scotland 2023)

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

different from the most abject disenfranchisement we think of as enslavement. A talent is 6000 denarii, and a denarius is a fair day's pay for manual labour.<sup>26</sup>

And yet the 'slave' who lives and acts incompetently with extreme wealth is not "free". And here's a teaching point: Not even the most privileged or entitled can be allowed to be morally autonomous. And the mention of 'wife and children' prohibits us from considering people in isolation.<sup>27</sup>

***Who is responsible if the culpable debtor's family suffers and starves because of the brutal exercise of 'criminal justice'?***

There is a dramatic exaggeration here to push the consideration of limited forgiveness beyond the mundane calculation of 'seven times' into a situation where the wronged person in a relationship of faith with another is expected to lose count. A tally-keeping count, reaching either 77 or 490 forgiveness (to take different readings into account), becomes as mean and ridiculous.<sup>28</sup>

***Does genuine and heartfelt forgiveness wait eagerly for the chance not to forgive?***

But equally, is it right to risk taking into our mouths the most 'strenuous commands' of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we appear to be the ones assuring of anything but pardon for those who do not "forgive your brother or sister from your heart."<sup>29</sup>

To know and believe ourselves set free and enabled by forgiveness rather than paralysed and disabled by guilt is essential to the spiritual bonuses of the Christian life.<sup>30</sup>

Our awareness of participation in a global culture currently still based on activities well-known to harm everything which sustains life could stop us in our tracks if ever we took it to heart. To speak of a 'carbon footprint; can seem mundane and meaningless.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>27</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>28</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>29</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>30</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>31</sup> (Scotland 2023)



Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

Nations have accused nations in the climate crisis and, before God, as it were, looked to hold to account those incurring a ‘climate debt’ of pollution and habitat destruction. The concept of ‘Loss and Damage’ was loudly highlighted in Glasgow at COP26. Still, even after a boost at COP27, the amounts being offered for the fund are a minuscule fraction of what’s needed to help poorer nations prepare for the effects, which cannot be evaded.<sup>32</sup>

***How can such ‘aid’ be given joyfully and generously as an investment in all security rather than grudgingly and evasively seeking to find ways not to bear even that cost?***

So whilst the example given in the passage is about the radical Christian witness of forgiveness in costly loving personal interaction, especially in what should be the exemplary community of the church (rather than the wider society, which has different standards and is beyond our control), the applications can be globally significant. The exaggeration wrenches the teaching out of the merely mundane.<sup>33</sup>

## Message

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

## Reflection

34

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.

---

<sup>32</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>33</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>34</sup> (Stalley n.d.)

Exodus 14:19-31

Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18

Romans 14:1-14

Matthew 18:21-35

[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

### 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>35</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?

## 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>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> (Deane-Driummond 2017)

<sup>36</sup> (Prayers for creation and nature March 17, 2023)

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

## Bibliography

- Africa, Anglican Church of South. 2023. *Seasons of Creation*. Southern Africa: United Thank Offering.
- Barclay, Paul. 2022. *Australian security and climate change*. Accessed August Monday, 2023. <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/bigideas/australian-security-and-climate-change/14090344>.
- Deane-Driummond, Celia. 2017. *A Primer In Ecotheology*. Eugene, OR: Casade Companions.
- Hannam, Peter. 2023. *Australia's emmissions fell 0.4% in 2022*. Accessed August 15, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/may/31/australia-emissions-fell-04-in-2022-despite-increases-in-transport-and-agriculture-pollution>.
- March 17, 2023. *Prayers for creation and nature*. Accessed August Thursday, 2023. <https://avepray.com/prayers/prayers-for-creation-and-nature/>.
2007. *Rainbow Spirit Theology*. Hindmarch: ATF Press.
- Richter, Sandra L. 2020. *Stewards of Eden*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- Scotland, Eco-Congregation. 2023. *Seasons of Creation*. Accessed 2023. <https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/season-of-creation-creation-time-creationtide-2023/>.
2023. *Season of Creation (Offical Website)*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgAbavjkTik&t=2s>.
- Stalley, Michael. n.d. *Being with God, Each Other and Community - Transforming Relationships*. Accessed 2023. <https://www.stbarts.net.au/lent-2023-week-1>.
2023. *United Nations Climate Change*. Accessed August 15, 2023. <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/workstreams/approaches-to-address-loss-and-damage-associated-with-climate-change-impacts-in-developing-countries>.

## Appendix:

### Alternate readings:

### Exodus 15:1b-11,20-21

Words of triumph from the mouth of a *woman* leader, prophet and judge. Just let that sink in for a while. The joy is no less that the triumph is God's. This is, of course, otherwise, that unlovely and apparently unchristian thing, a song of gloating over enemies - but also and primarily a song of joy at survival despite overwhelming odds because of the solidarity of God. The 'Magnificat' - the Song of Mary (Miriam's namesake?) [Luke 1:46-55] looks to the pulling

Exodus 14:19-31  
Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18  
Romans 14:1-14  
Matthew 18:21-35  
[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

down of the mighty from their thrones and the poor being filled whilst the rich go away empty.

There's a huge difference between the songs of triumph sung by imperial armies of overwhelming strength, taking all the credit for crushing and humiliating their victims and this, the gleeful celebration of liberation, given for the oppressed people to tap into - and, once more, Creation mightily on the side of justice.

### **Psalm 103:(1-7), 8-13**

Selected verses from another Psalm of encouragement by the counting of blessings, calling on the personalities of the whole of Creation, and calling on the wholeness of our entire created being to 'bless God's holy Name'. We should note that the selection makes the Psalm look more human-focused, whereas taken as a whole, it celebrates humanity in the context of wider Creation.

"all that is within me, praise his holy name" [v1]

*Is there any aspect of your existence, identity or behaviour that this excludes?*

*What do you share with fellow creatures - down to the DNA of your cells, your dependence on the oxygen from plants and the sun?*

*How is this acknowledged in your life of faith?*

*Who is part of this 'choir'?*

*Is it for you to exclude?*

We are special, valuable and loved because we are part of the whole. Indeed, this psalm fearlessly adopts inclusiveness as a strategy for praise. God's justice is not parochial or partisan, and therein lies the greatness ... though 'Moses and the children of Israel' received a special gift worthy of mention; thus, diversity is also affirmed. To be who you are, rather than bland and uniform, praises God. Nonetheless, to be oppressed is to be the object of God's particular concern and action, irrespective of national identity.

Exodus 14:19-31

Psalm 114 or Exodus 15:1-13, 17-18

Romans 14:1-14

Matthew 18:21-35

[Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103: (1-7)8-13]

*Or perhaps of species?*

*Can a river be oppressed?* <https://www.rightsofrivers.org/>

The singer is most exuberant of all about the things they have not earned or deserved, being set free to pursue a good life. And yet this extract concludes with a mention of fear. Not the fear of a captive for their jailer - rather a respectful awareness that warnings are to be heeded. Just as a loving parent would warn their offspring. What else are the reports and projections of climate scientists but God's warnings through the community of Creation?<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> ECS Eco-Congregation Scotland