

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]



# WEEK 4

# A Second Chance

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

---

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

# 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>

---

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

# Reading

## Read Exodus 16:2-15 - NRSV

Sometimes it seems we would rather put up with pain and injustice than do something about it.<sup>3</sup>

*What is the moral tipping point?*

*What's the 'budget of irritation' beyond which the most heartfelt activism will fall on deaf ears?*

For a story of about three thousand years ago, the wilderness experience of transition offers amazing solidarity - but no answers - for anyone struggling to convey the urgency of change and the possibility that having left the Fleshpots of Fossil Fuels, there might be a better, healthier, more just way of life somewhere beyond the 'meanwhile'.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, it's not, nor does it need to be a direct parallel. Slavery might continue indefinitely, as the Pharaohs seemed to have succeeded in decapitating any semblance of leadership from the Hebrew workers. However, the exacerbating factor was a 'hostile environment' campaign of additional repression, which pushed everyday moaning, which had continued even through the attempt to murder male babies, up a notch to 'crying out to God'.<sup>5</sup>

This story also offers insight into the burdens of leadership: Moses was following a calling rather than pursuing a selfish interest, hugely hampered by the practical difficulty of communicating with his community, even the basic details of what that involves. Pray for your leaders every day when they are the 'meat in the sandwich' between circumstance and the wilful ignorance of their people.<sup>6</sup>

These people, who suspiciously outcast Moses, who is trying to lead, have been deprived of risk and self-determination for generations, knowing nothing but the

---

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

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

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

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

brutal infantilisation and abusive dependency of slavery. Then they found themselves in the desert wilderness, a “wilderness of snakes and scorpions and hostile tribes,” having been taken there out of the certainty of slavery by an unfamiliar ancestral God.<sup>7</sup>

Freedom, in the sense of somewhere to settle down, was promised but has yet to be particularly on their horizon. Not part of their ‘today’. They were in “limbo”, not having learned the dance. And so, to comfort themselves, and perhaps with irritation combined with common sense, they harked back, in a somewhat ridiculous way, to the themes of the very same slavery from which their cry had come to God in the first place.<sup>8</sup>

Then the Lord said, “I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. So, now that they’ve escaped, we hear the absurd whinge about the “fleshpots of Egypt”. Putting slavery together with comfort and freedom from worry. Which is nonsense. But in the desert, it’s attractive nonsense. The deceptions of nostalgia can distort our ability to appreciate, value, and act on our current situation. Our memories don’t need a vast scientific research project to prove this - our memories are modified and enhanced by being re-remembered.<sup>9</sup>

When you hear something completely new or foreign, it is very demanding to listen well enough to take it in without only comparing it with your experience.<sup>10</sup>

***How do you run with no inhibition at all to make that “soldier’s leap” over the chasm of “not- being-a-slave” to land on the far bank of freedom?***

If someone had said to the soldier as he leapt, “that’s a foolish thing to do are you sure you’ll make it” he would probably have fallen into the torrent below. The times to stop and think are before and after the leap. Not in the middle of it when what matters is to keep moving. Perhaps we can understand, in the story's logic, why God does not immediately come up with the milk and honey of the

---

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

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

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

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

promised land but rather the temporary and bland travelling rations of the manna and the quails.<sup>11</sup>

That perhaps is why with all the best intentions in the world there is still a need to question every generation, preaching of the love of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in a world of privilege and money and power and blaming and deserving, so often meets with blank looks, and disbelief, and appeals to be “sensible”, and relegate Jesus’s idealistic nonsense to some decorative role. We live in limbo.<sup>12</sup>

What is new, different, and very difficult to comprehend is the urgency, growing more palpable, it seems, with every day that passes, to change the way more or less everything in the world is powered and financed for the good of the world, of our children, and our children’s children. However, we are already seeing, and most of you will see, in your lifetime, alarming effects. There is An urgency to stop doing what causes harm and prepare for the coming effects of the damage already done, including preparing spiritually. What churches should be well equipped to do for our Christian faith is most valuable when it provides and sustains us with hope through times of uncertainty. In so many ways: as a church, as a nation, in a family of nations, we are in mid-leap. And the message of Christ, in such circumstances, will not be “just stop there”! But perhaps rather, ‘There you go!’

Toxic nostalgia! And yet survival is the imperative, endangered by dwelling on the fictional luxury of the carefree life of a slave. Or the ‘good old days’ of churches which could think and act freely in far more exclusive ways than might be acceptable today.<sup>13</sup>

This passage may be depressingly familiar, even too many within our churches. Those times when it seems no good deed goes unpunished. A response is made, the best that can be in the circumstances, and all the grumblers have to say is, ***“What is it?”***

The people ignorantly exercise their new-found freedom in lashing out against those who work hardest for their liberation and well-being. Again, does this ring any bells in our own most recent history? To make it worse, they suffer genuine and immediate hardship, which can’t be soothed or argued away. The Grumblers do have a point. It’s compelling and easy to get sucked into.<sup>14</sup>

---

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

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

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

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

To accompany real change is like being a partner at a child's birth. (And I'm recalling here some of the most exhausting few. We may have to wait a while for gratitude and appreciation. The demands made on us may be extreme, but they arise out of the horizon-blocked urgency of pain and distress.

So, if there is grumbling in a hard-pressed community in the endless between-times of the desert, the grumbled-against may need first to listen.<sup>15</sup>

Taken alone, 'facts' may mislead slave drivers with no interest in damaging their workforce through starvation. Thus, the road to freedom seems harsh by comparison.

The costs of a Just Transition - from our enslavement to those fossil fuels that have led to climate imbalance and the extinction of vital wildlife seem high. And the real and sustaining benefits (clean air, better health, less stress) should be readily recognised before a more thorough transition. Therefore, if they are identified, the distress of those on the sharp end of redundancies and economic slumps makes it hard for them to be sufficiently valued.

Dishonesty about 'solutions' doesn't help either—no more than falsely taking on board a responsibility that is not entirely yours. Liberation is an arduous journey.<sup>16</sup>

Moses and Aaron are correct, and maybe courageous, to remind the people of God's involvement. But is there any other time and place where leaders can or conveniently blame God or blame 'the way things are'? But pray, deeply and earnestly, for those who try to get the truth across and note God's gracious approach when the 'grumbling' of the people is not without cause.<sup>17</sup>

## **Read Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45 - NRSV**

### ***The "Linked-In" spin on the Exodus... all positive.....***

It's a comforting, lifesaving, edifying (*and to the privileged, irritating*) habit of oppressed people or those conscious of their own material poverty, defiantly to

---

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

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

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

claim and reclaim what God has done *for them*. God has a “face” which can be sought: a relationship to cultivate.

It builds self-esteem, related to hope, which is needed to confront despair so that chances for liberation are not passed by. And it’s defiant: ‘how dare those we have oppressed not be destroyed by it!’<sup>18</sup>

As COP 28 comes into view, we note that whatever the failings of the global gatherings on the climate crisis, those which include the voices of the smaller, poorer “nations” are more likely to make some progress. The tiny nation of Vanuatu sponsored the United Nations resolution on the legal protection of the oceans.<sup>19</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1135142>

This psalm is one of many powerful linkages of God as Creator - and Sustainer - with the *creation* of justice. Is ‘sustainable’ also always ‘just’? If not, why not? Should that be literally un- thinkable? From verse 41, the reference to the beautiful transformation of the dry landscape by water also refers back to Exodus 16. What events in the history of your own community define your identity as a people who express their love for God in their care for Creation, neighbours, and fellow creatures?<sup>20</sup>

### **Read Philippians 1:21-30**

Paul’s morbid fixation on ‘getting away to a better place’ is a ruse to express the depth and value of living your life right now in hope and justice. Living - the more demanding option - is “Christ”.<sup>21</sup>

*Nonetheless, the intense and relaxed consciousness of mortality adds a valuable corrective and urgency to our unwillingness to contemplate the fragility of the world - further corrected by the realisation that, within our own lifetimes, we will not be able to solve every problem. Back in the Garden of Eden, the most damaging lie told by the snake was, “you will not die”. But the point is not to live unchanging for ever. In whatever time is given to us, the contribution we do make, known or unknown to the world, will be valued by God.*<sup>22</sup>

We should also be cautious about the ‘privilege of suffering’. The gift is not in pain but in solidarity: we more readily face the often-unavoidable trials of our

---

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

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

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

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

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

lives upheld by the prayerful support of others. Togetherness also mitigates against intimidation, and many churches' experience this year of genuine togetherness despite lockdown and separation chimes with that of Paul and his friends. We have discovered that relationships conveyed 'virtually' are nonetheless real. Prayer has long been a medium of relationship, supported by letters, emails, or whatever else, that hold our communities together. Finally, Paul is never under any illusion of his value or the dependence of that value on the support of others. In the Eco-Congregation movement, we have had to address the problem of humility with regard to the visibility of good and encouraging church initiatives: boasting, of the sort Paul encourages, certainly has its place" letting our light shine before others "(Matthew 5:16) "so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."<sup>23</sup>

### **Read Matthew 20:1-16**

This story is introduced to unpack the meaning of "the Kingdom of Heaven" - or the 'Reign of the Sky' - a prescription for how Creation can and might work...Human activity is a dynamic participant part. Once more, Heaven is understood as part of the unified Creation of 'Heaven and Earth' or perhaps 'Sky and Soil' rather than anything merely abstract. Heaven is never disconnected from Earth, as the Lord's Prayer might remind us.<sup>24</sup>

***Are we praying for justice throughout Creation as we say 'on Earth as in Heaven', or do we take the second part for granted?***

In this understanding, we can come close to a literal or at least experiential understanding without needing to veer into fundamentalism. The "like" (cf the Kingdom is like) is a powerful statement, not an incidental allusion.<sup>25</sup> God "makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous". [cf Mathew 5:45]. Our experience is that this is truth.<sup>26</sup>

In our understanding, justice should not be restricted to human cultures or to abstract transactions unaffected by climate and natural conditions. It's a hot day, but there's work to be done and people to be paid. And the story's conclusion

---

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

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

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

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



Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

leaves no one in need, though some are angry and perhaps ‘envious. Dented pride is an acceptable cost for the well-being of neighbours.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most distinctive, if challenging, aspects of Christian participation in environmental campaigns and actions is the priority of grace of ‘undeserved’ ‘favour’. The evening-out and levelling-up that is a sign of God’s involvement. God sustains all life and, indeed, depends on mutual involvement.

We shouldn’t be oblivious to the fact that this is a story of farming activity that nourishes and sustains beyond the lives of those directly involved.<sup>28</sup>

*Is the landowner God?* Not easy to be definite either way.

It shouldn’t be necessary, though maybe it is, to question the difference as well as the common ground in perceptions of ‘fairness’ and of ‘justice’. God’s justice is the acknowledgment of need rather than the wanton disregard of handicaps or the reinforcement of privilege and/or entitlement. The pay promised is “whatever is right”.<sup>29</sup>

In the way Jesus told the story, characters say what the storyteller wants them to, but perhaps the most telling phrase is “you have made them equal to us”. Of course, ‘equal’ is what all the workers were from the start, as well as their willingness to work though opportunity.<sup>30</sup>

## Message

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

---

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

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

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

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

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

# Reflection

31

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?

## 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?

---

<sup>31</sup> (Stalley n.d.)

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

## 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.

### Bibliography

- Africa, Anglican Church of South. 2023. *Seasons of Creation*. Southern Africa: United Thank Offering.
- Deane-Driummond, Celia. 2017. *A Primer In Ecotheology*. Eugene, OR: Casade Companions.
- 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.
- 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>.

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

## **Appendix:**

### **Alternate readings:**

#### **Jonah 3:10-4:11**

This is a wonderful, subversive, and humorous story in which the entertainment potential (whales, worms, and repentant animals) should be shamelessly exploited rather than held respectfully in check. It's worthwhile briefly summarising the rest of the Jonah story, not taking for granted that everyone even knows the outline.

The multi-faith environment of the story is also helpful for us in a culture in which Christianity does not dominate, though our faith has vital things to say as bearers of God's word of love for all. Where these things may be stern or scary, we must look to Jesus rather than Jonah: every hard truth must be offered in love. Our expectations of being heard do not determine how worthwhile it is to speak.<sup>32</sup>

Whales and worms aside, by far the most 'miraculous' aspect is that, without waiting either for the impending disaster or for the religious conversion of the Ninevites, indiscriminate life-saving change for all creatures is embraced, to the disgust of the prophet of doom. The pagans of Nineveh get on with it.<sup>33</sup>

God loves those who are messing up their world. Enough to throw them a lifeline they don't understand but grab hold of anyway. The Book of Jonah speaks powerfully to the institutional inertia of our churches and governments in the face of continuing climate emergency, and indeed, following the 'sackcloth and ashes' of lockdown.<sup>34</sup>

The humblest creation is on the side of God, who 'ordains' the worm to do its stuff and deprive Jonah's arrogant despair of its shelter. The God presented in the Book of Jonah presides over a world in which disasters are possible and avoidable. This is no peevish tyrant, nor should we see any such thing in 'natural' disasters. Saving life - including animal life - is more vital than getting things right or even the right belief.<sup>35</sup>

---

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

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

<sup>34</sup>

<sup>35</sup> (Scotland 2023)

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

So every suggested, large or small, the response of churches to climate and environmental emergencies is for the good of all, seeking the will of God, which is also for the health of beloved Creation, in which our species has never played a neutral role. And if, for now, we have been Jonah's, well, the patient but firm nudging of God, for a prophet who has done their job but can't cope with the outcome - this is for us!<sup>36</sup>

### **Psalm 145:1-8**

Whilst stocking up on the awe and wonder of Creation, we also learn that the 'blame game' is not the choice of those who would ingratiate themselves with God, whose majesty is made all the more evident by his neglect of knee-jerk retributive fervour, for God is "slow to anger", and this very slowness is a sign of strength.<sup>37</sup>

In an age of climate emergency, and following on from the virus crisis, finding a culprit and taking it out on them should be one of the many luxuries we set aside.

God is referred to as 'King', which, like 'father', brings some problems, given the miserable Old Testament experience of human 'kings like those of other nations. [Samuel Chapter 8]. Given Jesus' critique of 'the rulers of the gentiles' [Mark 10:42, Matthew 20:25], should we consider whether this address is worthy only of God? And what might be the implications for what human rulers should aspire to live up to? The absolute dictators of Europe culture in recent centuries are, in any case, a travesty of the accountable, 'shepherding' ideal of biblical kingship.<sup>38</sup>

The singer of the psalm derives a great personal benefit from the regularity of the praise they offer. They are not diminished by acknowledging God's greatness. Indeed, the contrary seems to be the case. Claiming our place and purpose, ourselves, as word and acts of God, grants dignity.<sup>39</sup>

This is enhanced as they join in the chorus of Creation (marvellous works themselves) and God's action for justice. It is noted that this is worthy not only of led and immediate praise but also of pondering, thought, and discernment.

---

<sup>36</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>37</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>38</sup> (Scotland 2023)

<sup>39</sup> (Scotland 2023)

Exodus 16:2-15  
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45  
Philippians 1 or 1:21-30  
Matthew 20:1-16  
[Jonah 3:10-4:11; Psalm 145:1-8]

Over and above the thrill of the beautiful words, how are their power and the benefit they bring sink in and do their work on our lives? God is 'big enough' to be compassionate. Jesus says we can be likewise. (Luke 6:36). The multi-generational scope of the Psalm begs the question of our responsibility for those generations to come: will we have been seen to praise God in our care of Creation?<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> (Scotland 2023)