

Exodus 17:1-7  
Psalm 78:1-4, 11-16  
Philippians 2 or 2:1-13  
Matthew 21:23-32  
[Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Psalm 25:1-9]



# WEEK 5

## We Must Not Fail To Act

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

[St John’s Cathedral – Shining Light on Modern Slavery.](#) ; [Fair for people, Fair for Planet.](#) ;

[Human Trafficking;](#) [Human Trafficking – ABC Radio](#)

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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.

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**Amen.**<sup>2</sup>

## Reading

### **Read Exodus 17:1-7**

#### ***Do you live in Grumbletown..... (Meribah)?***

We know that a time of transition lies ahead of us. A scary caveat comes in the story of the prolonged existence of the Hebrews following the Exodus, in the wilderness, which some could certainly be called ‘desert’—a place of absolute and immediate hardship. Tempers fray without hope, and the only comfort is in the self-destructive attack rather than the encouragement of our leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The Exodus story involves the ‘extinction’ of a generation who weren’t prepared for (or in agreement with) the demands of a life renewed as a nation. Our own time is far, far more urgent. 40 more years of the status quo, even with all the measures taken thus far, would be deadly to neighbours, fellow creatures, and maybe ourselves. We’ve seen so many: times already that change is brutal and sudden, not conveniently gradual. We need all parts of every generation living to come together in a creative response.<sup>4</sup>

And right now, rather than at some unspecified time when other reviews and reorganisations have taken their course. Under pressure, people lash out, and we may have to be prepared for this as the implications of Net Zero aspirations become clear. Or even the impact of taking our faith seriously as a resource for survival.<sup>5</sup>

***What, for our generation, would equate to that fraudulent security of slavery?***

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

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

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

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

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*What tempts people to pull out, go back, and give up?*

*Who or what makes environmental prayer, commitment, and action look pointless and futile?*

*Do you need something as extraordinary as water from a rock?*

*Maybe it's there in front of you?*

**Read Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16**

As a Christian community, our most powerful and immediately available resource is found in the resources of scripture, praise and tradition. Climate Crisis drives us further in, giving us all the more reason to value this heritage rather than abandon it: no more than we should abandon a life raft in a storm! We still have to add the need for honesty and openness. However, we have heard and received and rejoiced in such stories, treasures, wisdom, and encouragement; it will have been via human interpretation, thanks to the well-meaning and conscientious employment of an expected idiom. Of course, the climate crisis cannot but transform that, even as electric lighting and amplification have transformed our worship experience.<sup>6</sup>

Just as, in times gone by, female saints were “corrected” to male. Indeed, the Greek word for ‘human’ was miraculously rendered as ‘man’ despite available and specific vocabulary for men and women. So, the widespread Biblical acknowledgement of Creation's value and personality as a participant and agent of God’s works has been downplayed. Because that’s what we thought we had to do. The benefit of the Sabbath and the Jubilee to wildlife and human life has been rendered all but invisible, let alone the all-embracing scope of the Great Commission of the Risen Christ in Matthew 28 and Mark 16: ‘Good News to all Creation’.<sup>7</sup>

So make the most of that divine gift of Scripture and the legends and tales of our own culture, but as you do so, pray for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in your presentation and interpretation. Remember, you are part of the story, as those who tell it all the more. And so is suffering Creation.<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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## **Read Philippians 2:1-13**

Go on, sinner, make my day!

Selfishness is over-rated like any lie, whether for nations, cultures or individuals. It's a haemorrhage in the circulation of goodness. And the life of our planet is endangered by the outworking of what is now nothing other than consciously damaging injustice. The age of innocent pollution is past. However, we know well what they do, selfishness and greed. But, to the extent that you might read this passage as the knee-jerk opposite, it is bleak and empty selflessness. Simply giving up rather than assessing your place, your contribution, and your reliance on grace. Don't hide from the scary truth.<sup>9</sup>

The message here is that our own and only true interests lie in the common good. And we're discovering, rather late in the Age, that this is global wisdom. No predator will live long if they eradicate their prey. But, as the Old Testament so frequently attests, injustice sometimes persists long enough for the oppressed to cry out to God.<sup>10</sup>

Christ's way of letting go to let life thrive is already and explicitly the Way Creation Works "*in heaven and on Earth and under the Earth*". None of this is abstract. As represented in Scripture, Creation does mean this planet and the experiences of its inhabitants - is a unity. Sky and soil of course, therefore, the global scope of the crises we're continuing to exacerbate as a Global North culture is very reluctant and once more, there's a game or a role to be played. The survival and the thriving not of the strongest but of the community and the ecosystem, whose members are rewarded for finding their place and purpose to the greatest benefit of all.<sup>11</sup>

## **Read Matthew 21:23-32**

King Charles has just inherited the role of 'Defender of the Faith'. All is well and good, but like those irritating security systems on your computer protecting it against what you bought it for and the multi-stage authentication systems for

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

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

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purchasing a small item online, there comes the point when the project of protection and defence overtakes life. And where the dubious ethic comes into play, of crossing the red-line standards of integrity and non-violence, transforming the institution into an idol rather than a servant of the Creator God.<sup>12</sup>

However, the entitled who choose corruption, even “with the best intention”, find themselves at the back of God’s queue behind those against whom they would warn others. Those in most immediate moral need can be attended to first.<sup>13</sup>

This exchange between Jesus and “the chief priests and elders of the people” seems to be a PR battle at first glance. But we also see it in some academic debates. Those beautiful games where the truth is valued less than winning. And where, alarmingly, sincerity and loyalty can be twisted into opposition to truth. It should be tragically familiar.<sup>14</sup>

Hypocrisy is *not* redeemed by being “in the best possible cause”. Energy security is not guaranteed by renewed investment in what needs to end. Nor can short-term economics or offers of jobs in new fossil fuel exploration excuse what the UN Secretary-General called such “moral and economic madness” <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21228.doc.htm>.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus knew, as he entered the Temple that he would face ‘credible’ opposition and the prime intimidating strategy of undermining his credibility. Climate scientists and activists worldwide have been subjected to such things for decades - alongside death threats and character assassination. It’s well known that fossil fuel interests have funded this opposition. Indigenous activists have been murdered, standing up against the violation of their homelands and forests. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/29/over-1700-environmental-activists-killed-in-past-decade-report>.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, the climate crisis and positive Christian responses to it - including the joy, the deepening of faith and the strengthening of community that these things can bring - must be a challenge to the particularises of how we spoke and prayed before it was beyond a reasonable doubt, as it now is, that we’re in a

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

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

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

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

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

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crisis and that it was caused by human activity. Today Jesus scrutinises the motives of every delay or evasion of rapid and radical change, both in the economy - and the churches! But he brings us closer - deeper in- to what faith is really for.<sup>17</sup>

It may well be that your favourite hymn prayer or translated passage already strengthens and encourages you even as you're aware of what we face for the rest of our lives. But if it holds you back - inspired recycling (not just concessionary tweaking) unlocks the spiritual treasure of resilience and hope that faith should release.<sup>18</sup>

## Message

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

## 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?

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

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

<sup>19</sup> (Stalley n.d.)

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### 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>20</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.

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<sup>20</sup> (Deane-Driummond 2017)



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## Appendix:

### Alternate readings:

#### Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32

“You’ll die of old age, but we’ll die of climate change” - is one of the grimmer and more popular banner slogans you’ll see in protests by youth movements such as Fridays for Future. I’ve encountered those in older generations who - sympathetically - agree with this general point: that generations born after the damage has been done carry a disproportionate burden of the effects caused within the lifetime of those now looking to retirement and the several generations preceding.

But maybe it’s not that simple.

It’s tempting to look back to the choking pollution of the industrial revolution over two hundred years ago, leading into ‘Victoria’s Inferno’ as experienced in some of the more intensive industrial sites, but that would be to miss the scale and urgency of our current situation, with vastly greater human populations and levels of industrialisation and use of fossil fuels, let alone the obscene waste of lives and resources in every military conflict: not just Ukraine, but also Iraq.

In amongst the ‘unfairness,’ a given generation might either feel or own up to,

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we need to hear God's all-embracing concern: "Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine."

The speed of change and the urgency of action - as well as the value of a change of heart and life - means that all generations are engaged and affected by the challenges of our day. All are called together to embrace justice at all levels. Whatever the level of your burden and responsibility, and the particular circumstances of your location, no one is exempt or 'off the hook', but neither is anyone excused from care and consideration for fellow creatures - including humans!

Finally, there is a similarity between the increasingly strong and urgent warnings from the UK Climate Change Committee and the IPCC (United Nations climate body) and God's address to Ezekiel. God does not 'cry wolf': warnings ignored do indeed lead to disaster, and what matters is the practicalities of current and future action rather than getting bogged down in what might have been.

### **Psalm 25:1-8**

More emotional honesty from the Psalmist, squirming not just from the fear of violence but of the emotional and spiritual annihilation of the 'bad magic' of humiliation. The stuff that drives us over the edge. This time, though, the anguished prayer stops short of the enemies' destruction. The frustration of their "schemes". and the survival of the supplicant. For that, we can still pray with love and with wisdom. And there's scope for friendship after, as we unite to face common threats.

Suppose you've discredited a movement, idea, or group of people. In that case, there's no need to follow up with violence: the job is done, and their previous supporters join in, embarrassed at being associated. It's easy and fair to join in a precautionary prayer to avoid such discomfort.

People of faith, alongside others who care for Creation, are still -and maybe increasingly - vulnerable to mocking laughter. And as the psalm clearly acknowledges, our mistakes and flaws are daggers in the wound. Unaddressed, they fester.

Against the reputational weapons of humiliation, we have the defence of mutual support and honesty about those mistakes. To lie, deny, conceal - or refuse to

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attend to - inconvenient truth plays into the hands of those who choose to make themselves our enemies.

The juggernaut of momentum from right-wing media against anything labelled 'woke' (and especially care for Creation) has reached the level where, like 'Christian' - and indeed, 'Methodist' and perhaps even 'Queer', it can be a badge of pride.

***If you're not a happy TreeHugger, why not?***

Once more, take joyful pride in the mature and responsible revisiting of churches' historical links with slavery. Be prepared to acknowledge where we've played our part in the fossil fuel story. As well as what we can learn about the strategies of those who delayed abolition and the light that shines on the delay of transition.

Government officials and church officeholders with a personal history in fossil fuels have the strongest chance, in their well-informed change of heart and mind, to lead the way in transition. We need them: don't write anyone off because of their past.

It was long ago acknowledged, and every wise preacher will concur that "no saint is without sin, no sinner without a future" That includes you. And me. Thank God.

<https://scmpress.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780334061533/young-woke-and-christian-388>