

starters for Sunday

God, Whose Farm is All Creation

Creation Time: Week 2

14 September 2014

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank [Eco Congregation Scotland](#)'s writing group for their thoughts on Creation Time.

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Quick Guide...

Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

God, Whose Farm is All Creation

For Creation Time 2014 an ecumenical group brought together by Eco Congregation Scotland, has prepared material to support worship leaders, responding to the UN International year of Family Farming, and using a lectionary produced by the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells.

Creation Time

Creation Time started in the Orthodox Church in 1989 and has been supported by a growing number of churches across Europe since then. The European Christian Environmental Network has urged churches to adopt a Time for Creation stretching from 1 September to the feast of St Francis on 4 October. This was endorsed at the European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania in 2007, when it was agreed that Creation Time "be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change".

Family farming

Family farming includes all family-based agricultural activities, and it is linked to several areas of rural development. Family farming is a means of organising agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labour, including both women's and men's.

Both in developing and developed countries, family farming is the predominant form of agriculture in the food production sector.



The International Year of Family Farming

The 2014 International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) aims to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farming by focusing world attention on its significant role in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable development, in particular in rural areas. The goal of the 2014 IYFF is to reposition family farming at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agendas by identifying gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development.

Taken from: <http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/home/what-is-family-farming/en/>

For information on the main messages of IYFF go to: <http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/about/main-messages/en/>

Additional Resources – articles, information and resources

United Nations 2014 International Year of Family Farming

[UN website](#)

[Main messages of the International Year:](#)

Scottish-based material and UK-based material

[Short article from the Scottish Tenant farmers Association](#)

Guardian article: [Corporate stranglehold of farmland a risk to world food security, study says](#)

Article from The Scotsman [Family farms can fight global food crisis](#)

Drumness Farm, Perthshire: one example of family farming in Scotland today

Drumness Farm is owned by Sandy and Helen-May Bayne and family and is situated between the villages of Muthill and Auchterarder in Perthshire. The Bayne family have farmed in the area for well over a hundred years and Sandy and Helen-May's son Andrew is now managing the business so continuing the family tradition.

In the past century the size of the operation has increased both through the purchase of additional land and leasing from other landowners and is now over 700 acres.



The farm produces both livestock and crops. There is a herd of seventy suckler cows, and there are also 400 sheep. Crops grown include barley, wheat, potatoes, swedes and carrots.

Productivity and Compliance

Sandy stresses the need for the farm to be run productively in the current business environment. In this process the supermarkets play a huge role. Tesco's programme of farm compliance, called 'Nature's Choice' requires the farmer to draw up policies and provide supporting evidence on a range of issues including use of fertilisers and plant protection products; pollution prevention; wildlife and landscape conservation; energy use and recycling; and health and safety. The fat file of paperwork Helen-May must keep up to date demonstrates the paper trail that this compliance demands. At the same time the supermarkets keep a firm lid on prices with the consequence, according to Sandy, that supermarket shoppers in Britain continue to get vegetables at a relatively low price.

Growing potatoes for supermarkets

The potato crop at Drumness illustrates the scale at which farmers supplying supermarkets now operate. There are four large storage sheds on site each holding up to 2000 tonnes of spuds. Potatoes are entirely planted and picked by machine. 'Tattie howking', the back breaking work that once gave seasonal work to a small army of casual labourers including children, was replaced by machinery over twenty years ago, reducing the need for labour on the farm but increasing its carbon footprint. The farm now has a self-propelled potato harvester, which although expensive, goes a long way in inclement weather to protect the soil structure of the fields in which it works.

On the farm potatoes are graded by size on a long conveyor, then stored in one tonne wooden pallets boxes and, when they are needed, shipped by truck to packers such as Albert Bartlett for packing and onward delivery to supermarkets – some of Sandy's spuds may end up on your local supermarket shelves. Sandy noted that supermarkets are now using more produce from Britain and that imports of produce including potatoes from European countries such as Portugal had declined.

The farm is not organic and spraying, which is carefully applied using a sophisticated GPS system, is carried out with fungicides to control disease (e.g. potato blight) and for weed control. At the



same time other techniques of pest control such as swede nets, rolled out over the growing crop, preventing the attack by turnip flea beetle and cabbage white butterfly, are employed on the farm to reduce the need for spraying. Recent years have also seen the introduction of GPS controlled fertilizer application to improve accuracy and reduce waste.

A family farm in a time of change

Sandy is clearly proud of the operation of the farm, which has been able to thrive at a time of great uncertainty and when some other local producers have faced serious financial difficulties. He employs five staff including two seasonal workers from Slovakia. The quality of farm produce has met the high quality standards required by the supermarkets but at the same time this is no agricultural desert. The farm is set in beautiful rolling well wooded countryside and was alive with wildlife on the March day we visited: we saw hares, buzzards and roe deer. But there is large carbon footprint associated with this form of agriculture. Storing the spuds to keep them in shelf condition requires refrigeration units to keep four large barns at two degrees Celsius. However a 50KW array of solar panels has been installed on a shed roof. A large proportion of the electricity generated is used by the farm for refrigeration and running the potato grading line.

Lectionary used for Creation Time 2014 materials

[Bath and Wells Creation Time Lectionary](#)

Material from Christian Aid

[Christian Aid's harvest materials](#)

Details of Agribusiness and the commodification of food on world markets can be found in the [Hungry for Justice report](#).

Report advocating for [small scale farming as a solution to world hunger](#)

[Hunger for Justice](#): Hymns and songs to change the world.



The Writing Group

This material has been written by an ecumenical group:

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Wendy Young co-ordinates the Christian Aid worship and theology collective, the group responsible for the worship material for the seasons and moments of the Christian year on the Christian Aid's website. From Northern Ireland, attends Kelvinside Hillhead Church of Scotland church in the West End of Glasgow, brought up in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.



Bible Readings

[Job 38: 1-18](#)

Previously, Job, ‘a blameless and upright’ person (1: 1), despite having experienced a series of profound personal, social and economic disasters, declined to question God’s role in these happenings. Now, however, he has done so. As this passage opens we hear the beginnings of God’s three-chapters-long ‘response’ to Job.

God’s ‘response’, however, does not respond to Job’s situation or answer his (and the readers’) questions about what has taken place. The divine tone is not contrite but caustic: ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?’ It turns out that God is demanding answers from Job, not vice versa.

As a human being, Job was absent when God was at work in creation - only the stars, the heavenly beings were present then to respond with songs and shouts of joy. (38: 7) Nor can one who is reliant on the human eye (in pre-satellite days) hope to measure the world’s extent. Humans, in their limited strength, fear the power of the seas whilst it is God who had the power to contain them. (38: 8-11)

As it is with the sea, so it is with the heavens (38: 12-15). Whether the reference is to ‘the wicked’ or to named constellations (translations differ) it is God who commands, whilst Job, absent at the world’s beginning, is also unable plumb death’s mysteries at the end. (38: 17) The divine remains elusive, declining to accept the limitations of any role assigned or implied by human questions.

[Psalm 139: 1-14](#)

As with the reading from Job this reading emphasises human finitude in contrast to the power of God. In the Job reading this is unsettling but in the psalm it is portrayed in a much more positive light.

The psalm commences with the assertion that there is nothing left to hide from God: ‘you have searched me and known me’. (139: 1) Like Job, the psalmist’s knowledge of God and the world is limited (v. 6) but God’s knowledge of the person is total, including actions, thoughts, intentions



and speech (vv.2-5). God hems in the psalmist, but the sense is of divine protection, rather than threat or rebuke. (v.5)

God's omniscience is matched by God's omnipresence; found on land, sea and in the heavens. Job did not know the 'gates of death' (38: 17) but those in Sheol know God's presence. (139: 8) Even light and dark are not beyond the power and presence of the one who created them (Genesis 1: 3): 'the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.' (139:12)

Human being are not above or distinct from creation. Instead, God is as much found at work in the individual as in wider creation, knitting the person together in their mother's womb, as it is poetically expressed. So the psalmist's experience leads not to worry or uncertainty but inspires praise and acknowledgment: 'wonderful are your works; that I know very well.' (139: 14)

Romans 1: 18-25

Despite references to God's wrath being against 'all ungodliness' (v.18), placed within the context of the 'creation of the world' (v.20), observed in human tendency to 'serve the creature rather than the Creator' (v. 25) it remains a challenge not to narrow interpretation of the passage to focus on individual salvation (influenced by Reformation debates) or a social focus (influenced by its use in contemporary debates over human sexuality).

Whatever historical or contemporary theological pressures come to bear, however, it is important not to lose the creational perspective in these verses. Once again God's role as Creator is acknowledged. Indeed, creation is perceived as a way in which God is known and which should elicit an appropriate response of giving thanks, though not all do so: 'though they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks.' (1: 21)

In the Roman setting Paul critiques religious worship which uses images of creatures (human and otherwise), along with the social / sexual practices associated with such cults. People today are much less likely to put their faith in idolatrous religious cults. Yet there is a temptation to place ultimate hope in human (creaturely) individual, social, technological, political or economic actions, as the basis for human gain or flourishing.



Saint Paul might wonder, if one eliminates or puts firmly into second place the God of creation (and justice) how will this affect ethical restraints or wisdom concerning human actions and their impact upon the planet?

[Matthew 5: 13-16](#)

The Beatitudes have been spoken (5: 3-12) and now the Sermon on the Mount continues. Jesus' followers, not the world in general, are the ones receiving instruction: 'after he sat down his disciples came to him... and [Jesus] taught them, saying...' (5: 1-2)

His instruction employs images of salt and light, seen in the rural, domestic and city contexts. Salt, a product of the land, gives flavour and prevents corruption. It was sometimes seen as a symbol of wisdom (see Colossians 4: 6). Light (in a land without street lamps) shines from a lampstand in the house (5: 15) or makes a city visible from a distance, as Sepphoris was from Nazareth, a few kilometres away.

So, the disciples' lifestyle is to be distinctive, wholesome and visible. Living life in response to the beatitudes will achieve this; the poor in spirit and the mourners are blessed; meekness, hunger for righteousness and mercy characterise the Christian. They are peacemakers, though in their life they may experience persecution.

All of this was lived out in communities closely connected to the land. What use would a life of discipleship be if it did not impact on those around the disciple and upon how the land was used? One might as well have flavourless salt or bury a light under a bushel of grain. How then, should the beatitudes be applied to discipleship in today's setting, and what part will good use of the land play in visible Christian lifestyle?



Sermon Starter Thoughts

It's not easy to live life in ways which seem to go against the flow of how 'everyone' understands the world to be – religiously, ethically, socially, politically and economically. We have to be able to challenge widely shared stories that say, 'that's just the way things are'; for example, the widespread belief that large scale technologically intensive farming is the only viable way to feed a world in danger of starving.

Today's readings challenge us to take on that difficult task. We might work on assumptions that this is our world. From within our own mental, moral and practical resources, we alone construct and maintain its structures and systems. To such attitudes the words, 'who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?' comes as a timely challenge.

Our readings from Job, from Psalm 139 and from Romans demand that we begin from the perspective that we live in God's world, a part of God's creation, of which we are a part. Human knowledge has limits; not present at creation, never having seen the 'gates of death' (Job). In contrast, God has always been present and knows all there is to know about us (Psalm 139).

If our 'stories' ascribe ultimate worth to the things we create, make and manufacture rather than to the one who created us, the result (Paul argues) is that we are religiously and ethically led astray. Living life together, including organising our land use and food production, requires a robust set of values that enable us to challenge prevailing assumptions. This includes beliefs that the latest technological solutions must be best.

Jesus' teaching deploys images from his cultural setting to challenge his followers to express the values of the beatitudes in ways which subvert 'what everyone knows'. Questions and qualities of poverty (spiritual and material), mourning and meekness, righteousness (or justice) and mercy, purity and peace making must guide Christian approaches to living in God's world, including how its food is produced and shared.



Prayers

Collect

Almighty God,
 you call your Church to witness
 that in Christ we are reconciled to you.
 Help us so to proclaim
 the good news of your love,
 that all who hear it may turn to you;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns
 with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

Prayer of approach

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. (Psalm 139: 1)
 When we sleep and when we wake: you are with us.
 When we are home and when we are away: you are with us.
 When we are alone and when we are together: you are with us.
 Yes, you are with us now: we worship you, O God.

Prayer of adoration and confession

We praise you, O God, for you give us life and land and the means to live.
 We praise you, O God, for in your Son, Jesus, you have entered into this world of farms and fields, of families and friendship, so that our lives might flourish
 We praise you, O God, for through your Holy Spirit you help us truly see creation's space, and make us long to share it with all our fellow creatures.
 Yet we are loath to acknowledge all we owe to you.
 As scripture says, 'they are without excuse, for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God, or give thanks.' (Romans 1: 21)



You are the Creator but we put faith in the things we create.

You are the Creator but we put ultimate faith in our wealth creation.

You are the Creator but we put ultimate faith in our technological 'fixes'.

You are the Creator but we put ultimate faith in ourselves.

So, forgive us, we pray, for these and our other failings.

Silence

And as we experience the good news of your forgiveness, help us to use well the good things of your world.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

O God, you call us to be salt in your world.

O God, you tell us to let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to you.

Hear us as we pray for your world.

We pray for all farmers, particularly those with family farms. We thank you for the work they do and for the food that they produce from land and sea.

We pray for all farmers who face uncertainty and worry, particularly those who farm where the climate is uncertain and the growing season now difficult to anticipate.

We pray for all farmers under economic pressure. May governments be supportive; banks be helpful; food suppliers deal justly.

God of Creation

Hear our prayer

We pray for our food, giving thanks for all that we have, remembering all who work to make sure it is safe to eat and good for our bodies.



We pray for opportunities to build family, friendship and fellowship through sharing food and drink.

We pray for the times we eat and drink as means to celebration, and we pray for strength to show restraint when tempted to excess.

God of Creation

Hear our prayer

We pray for churches that are a source of food to those in need, remembering particularly the work of food banks in our own nation.

We pray for church cafes, that they would be places of welcome and safety, where food is both nutritious and delicious.

We pray for church and community food growing projects, for community gardens and allotments, places where people grow food and grow together as people.

God of Creation

Hear our prayer

And in the quietness hear us as we bring you our individual hopes and concerns, seeking your wisdom, your love, your support, your strength.

Silence

God of Creation

Hear our prayer

Amen



Musical Suggestions

Job 38: 1-8

- CH4 127 O worship the king all glorious above
- CH4 242 Is this the way you made the world?
- CH4 260 Eternal Father, strong to save
- CH4 404 I danced in the morning (Lord of the Dance)

Psalms 139

- CH4 96 You are before me, God, you are behind
- CH4 97 O God, you search me and you know me

Romans 1: 18-25

- CH4 148 The spacious firmament on high
- CH4 224 The Spring has come, let all the church be part of it
- CH4 246 Great God of every shining constellation
- CH4 136 God's will for creation
- CH4 149 Let all creation dance

Matthew 5: 13-16

- CH4 543 Longing for light, we wait in darkness
- CH4 112 God, whose almighty word



Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Revealing Love](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#).



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to Eco Congregation Scotland for providing us with this Sunday's material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

