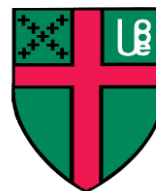




# Reflections for Creation Season 2017



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## About this project...

The Creation Season readings provide rich material for reflecting on social justice topics.

The following questions may be useful in your sermon preparation:

- 1) What does our religious teaching say to us about the selected issue?
- 2) What does the secular culture teach and tell us about the selected issue?
- 3) What is our personal experience with the selected issue?
- 4) Compare 1, 2 and 3. Where are there tensions? Similarities?
- 5) What are we called to do?
- 6) First steps?

These issue papers will be updated for the 2018 convention. If you would like to be part of our ongoing lectionary project or write an issue paper for us, please contact Mike Maloney ([meamon@aol.com](mailto:meamon@aol.com)).

For more information about the background of Creation Season, visit [eenonline.org](http://eenonline.org) (EpEN website) to find some great resources.

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## Additional Resources

### *Episcopal Networks Collaborative Issue Papers*

<http://enej.org/assets/pdfs/Economic%20and%20Social%20Justice%20Issue%20Papers%202015.pdf>

### 2015 Issue Papers: Table of Contents

Racial Oppression in America – Tiffany King  
Incarceration in the USA – The Rev. Dr. Paula M. Jackson  
The Widening of the Wealth Gap – Laura Russell  
Taxes and Economic Justice – John Mark Summers and Laura Russell  
The Making of a Segregated Neighborhood – Laura Russell  
The U.S. Housing Crisis and Political Repression – The Rev. Sarah Monroe  
Trade Agreements – The Rev. Dr. Christopher Johnson  
Immigration, Hope and Desperation – Dianne Aid, TSSF  
Predatory Lending – Verna Fausey and Laura Russell  
Human Trafficking – Sarah Leech and Laura Russell  
Community Investing – Sue Lloyd and Verna Fausey  
Resolutions Relating to Concerns of the Episcopal Networks Collaborative:  
    Addition to Baptismal Covenant – EpEN  
    Facilitate Dialogue on Climate Change and Divestment Strategy – EpEN  
Living Wage Principles - The Rev. Dick Gillett

*These issue papers are intended to help the reader with material on suggested sermon topics throughout the Church Year, including Creation Season.*

## Reflections for Creation Season 2017

Assembled by the Episcopal Ecological Network for your use in sermon preparation. It is our hope that these reflections will provide material and inspiration for looking at the scriptures through the eyes of justice in the face of the structural evils in our economic, ecological and social worlds. We are seeking hope for all of Creation in God's promises.

*You made the earth, and all that lives on it. You inspired prophets and shepherds, widows and slaves, to seek liberation from all that oppresses, so that we might be released to love fully. You became incarnate in Jesus Christ, so that through him we might experience the depth and width of your unquenchable love.*

*. . . . Through him we see a path not only to our own freedom, but a path to the liberation of the whole world.*

*— From the Eucharistic Prayer written by the Rev. LeeAnn Watkins  
in collaboration with the church's 9am liturgy team  
at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, St Paul MN.*

### **Proper 21 (October 1) by Wanda Copeland + Matthew 21:28-32**

Today's gospel focuses on authority—the source of authority, the embodiment of authority, and the recognition of authority. In this case, the chief priest and elders vie with Jesus for embodiment of authority, and the right of each to proclaim their source. The Temple 'authorities' confidently believe they are the ultimate embodiment because no earthly authority can trump theirs (after all, they are the Temple authorities). (Then, the source of their authority would also be superior to all others.) In challenging them with the question of John's authority, Jesus affirmed his own, for John was recognized as being a prophet by the people, and they would not dare go against the power of all who believe in God. Jesus' credibility speaks for itself (if they affirm John, the authorities must affirm Jesus). Being trapped trying to affirm one's own authority is an indictment, not only for the chief priests and elders, but for us as well. *Thus, those so contriving are caught in their own web of saving their position, not furthering God's.*

This should resonate well with us, for each of us works diligently to hold on to our own authority. Roman Catholic priest and teacher, Richard Rohr, reflects that so many well-intentioned folks listened faithfully to his teaching and insights. While many profess to love what he says, those reflections seldom lead to significant and lasting changes in the lives of his listeners. He says, *"Thinking about ideas or making judgments about what is moral or immoral seldom leads to a radically new consciousness. Transformative education is not asking you to believe or disbelieve in any doctrines or dogmas. Rather it is challenging you to 'Try this!'"*

When we, by our baptism, take on the mantle of Christ, we speak with his veracity, live by his plumb line, and constantly confirm that we walk in his paths. It is not our authority or competence that we seek to maintain. The main tension between the claim of the Temple

authorities and Jesus is that they strove to maintain the ‘boundaries’ of faithfulness while Jesus constantly invited others in.

In the lesson from Ezekiel 18, we hear God say, “know that all lives are mine...” There is no life that is beyond God’s care, no force beyond God’s attention, no love mightier than the love of Christ to bless and strengthen. That is the position we are to continue if we truly are Jesus’ disciples. It is that call we affirm as Christians—the call to steward in God’s name.

Rohr continues: “*So I will continue to encourage you to try something new: change sides, move outside your comfort zone, make some new contacts, let go of your usual role and attractive self-image, walk instead of drive, make a friend from another race or class, visit new neighborhoods, go to the jail or to the border, attend another church service, etc. Then you can live yourself into new ways of thinking, which then seem so right and necessary that you wonder how you could have ever thought in any other way.*”<sup>1</sup>

We are constantly being called to stretch beyond our shallow box of welcome, and imagine God’s love is for all. As we do that, we live into the fullness of what it means to be recipient of God’s greatest gift.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Richard Rohr, “The eight core principles,” *Radical Grace*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Center for Action and Contemplation: Fall 2012), 44-45.

What terrible judgment must come upon those who fail to imitate the ineffable example of Christ; who do not humble themselves below their neighbors and serve them, but rather exalt themselves above them! Indeed, the example of Christ may well terrify the exalted, and those high in authority; and still more the self-exalted. Who would not shrink from occupying the uppermost seat and from lording it over others when he sees the Son of God humble and eliminate himself?

--Martin Luther, *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. VII: 169-180 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House), 179-80.

## **Proper 22 (October 8) by Wanda Copeland + Matthew 21:33-43**

The gospel this week is a direct continuation of last week’s story. Jesus is still confronting and being confronted by the chief priests and elders who are questioning his authority. The parable this week gives specific details about the practice of tenant farmers and land-owners in first century Palestine, which is worth pursuing in order to better understand the context, but it will not be treated in this reflection.

Contrasted with last week, Jesus gives a very direct response to the Temple authorities. He IS the son of the land-owner who has come to collect what is rightfully God’s due. Those charged with stewardship of the land and the bounty of those lands are not welcoming. Nor are they even willing to give back what was not theirs—that portion that rightfully belongs to the land-owner [God].

The Hebrew lesson from Exodus 20 (the Ten Commandments summary) is a perfect counterpoint to this obstreperousness. The people have longed for a clear, strait-forward list of what God expects—and here it is, a simple 10 laws or commandments, which can successfully guide all human behavior, loyalty, and action. Some of us long for the clarity of these ‘bumpers’, while others chafe against the need for rules. Some take a feather and constantly tickle the edges of adherence, and still others poke them with a baseball bat. We seek holes or sub-clauses, ask for clarification, pepper God with our “but what if...” questions.



Authority is again the subject of this week, perhaps because we didn't absorb the gravitas of the message last week. Like the Temple authorities, we would just as soon not be considered under the restriction of God's command, even though we have asked for it. It is a constant test of wills.

Contrast that with the beauty of the earth as described in the Psalm. Recently I saw the PBS presentation of "Ireland's Wild Coast" with host Colin Stafford-Johnson. Like the words of today's psalm, Stafford-Johnson seemed amazed and awestruck by the fullness of nature. Everywhere he looks, there is beauty intricately woven together into a tapestry of life. The creatures of land and sea and air interact seamlessly with their habitat. Whales lazily float on their backs and flip fins along the surface. Birds carefully seek out food to bring back to hungry mouths of offspring. The sea calms at sunset, and a whole different set of creatures emerge to take on the work of night. Stafford-Johnson



is amazed at the majesty of each species, proclaiming his wonder at their purpose.

We do not ask if God's creatures seek diligently to be faithful, or strive to outdo their responsiveness to God's mercy. It is instinctual. It is natural. NOT doing the will of God, NOT seeking God's face is unnatural. God's life is abundant life.

As Ira Brent Driggers says, "In short, Jesus brings wholeness to a broken world, providing proleptic glimpses into what he elsewhere calls 'the kingdom of heaven.' This is what God's creation is supposed to look like. For anyone called by God to a particular ministry—namely everyone—there is the temptation to claim ownership of that ministry, to confuse service with entitlement... For us, the moment a sense of entitlement creeps into 'our' ministry is the moment we have closed ourselves off to what Jesus is doing in the world."<sup>1</sup>

This gospel asks who will remain faithful? Who will take charge of the "Jesus movement?" Who will defend it from any and all foes—including ourselves? By being proponents of and advocates for God's justice and mercy, we are saying—definitively and resolutely—we are.

<sup>1</sup>Ira Brent Driggers in "Working Preacher," October 5, 2008 at [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=145](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=145)

**Proper 23 (October 15) by Wanda Copeland +**

*Remember me, O Lord, with the favor you have for your people, and visit me with your saving help.” ~ Psalm 106:4*

In December 2010, Dr. Bruce Kramer, Dean of the School of Education, Leadership and Counseling at St. Thomas University, St. Paul, MN was diagnosed with ALS, a condition which has since taken his life. He wrote of his struggles in a blog entitled Dis Ease Diary, revealing his belief that the illness was more about his own coming to terms with mortality than something being imposed from without.

In his post for Maundy Thursday, 2014, Dr. Kramer wrote of the reality of walking his road alone, of feeling abandoned by God, and of being in such a different place from family, friends and colleagues whose varied reactions were often about *beating* the disease. He also talks about attending a lecture with the Dalai Lama, at the end of which His Holiness gave him a scarf and blessed him.

*“For a week I struggled in confusion as people asked me, “What was it like to be blessed by the Dalai Lama?” I tried to describe it... And then it dawned on me. It wasn’t about a singular blessing, him to me. It was a charge for intentional action. It was another awakening to open even more to the love that is all around us. Not, “meanwhile my blessing.” Finished and done, but “Meanwhile, my blessing...” Unfinished, a statement to me, to us to embrace love, for love’s action and motivation and intent can and must be lived into, breathed into until you cannot breathe any longer.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Episcopal Collect of the Day for this week says that we pray “that [God’s] grace may always precede and follow us...” We all know that prayer is never done, that we are always in need of grace and God’s mercy. We all recognize that we are a work in progress, an unfinished vessel into which God can always pour more tolerance and understanding.

If there is one message all our scriptures offer us, it is a recognition of our place in the world, and a tolerance that others are also on this treacherous path toward self-discovery and wholeness. Like looking into a prism, our lives and our faith journeys are multi-faceted. When we seem to grasp even a small part of truth, we become aware that we have so much further yet to go.

With all our lives, with all our strength, we are offered the opportunity to open to others some of the grace we have received, and share with them the vulnerability that says, ‘I’m not there yet, but with God’s help, I’m on the path.’


<sup>1</sup><https://diseasediary.wordpress.com/2014/04/17/maundy-thursday-from-the-silence/>

An Additional Reflection for **Proper 23 (October 15)** by Chuck Morello, with Alice Speers

**Exodus 32: 1-14**

One of the foci in the readings for Proper 23 in Year A is idolatry with its impacts. The reading in Exodus hits this heavily while the reading from Psalm 106 provides thoughts about overcoming or avoiding idolatry.

In the landscape of 2017, we are reminded just about daily, about the idolatry of all of us:

- Actions of our government to step away from the Paris Accords can cut across several aspects of concern. The result of not cutting carbon emissions could mean that individuals with certain allergies may miss more days of work, which will cut both production for their employer and income for themselves. Some individuals who may not have notable allergies can develop allergies as the pollution levels rise. Pollutants move with the winds and weather, so fossil fuels burned in Colorado can impact lungs and eyes and skin in Pennsylvania as well as in Colorado, in a city or in a suburb, or in a rural area. Fossil fuels have become an idol and we all, to some degree, become idolaters as well as those who get hurt.
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- Additionally, and possibly worse consequences are seen in the increase in sea level rise, glacier melting, and deadlier storm events caused mainly by burning fossil fuels.
  - Preferential treatment for or against people of a certain race or ethnicity or heritage are powerful images that make seductive and alluring approaches to our interactions with others. We include only those who are “like us” and exclude all others. Up into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century this went as far as to dehumanize the “other” and can still be seen in many places even today. This suppression or minimization leads to an impoverishment of good food stuffs, health care, and schooling, to the detriment of children’s development.
  - Overuse of fossil fuels becomes our Golden Calf. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century fossil fuels appeared to be just what we needed for society and economic development, and many turned to fossil fuels and pledge allegiance to this golden calf, much as the Israelites in Exodus turned toward the Golden Calf as their new god.



The good news for us from the story in Exodus is that there are many in the world who can be a Moses for us, who can remind us that God will always be there for us as we change our direction to focus more on others than ourselves. As I was reading Exodus and reflected on Moses reminding God that God had made a tremendous investment in saving the Israelites, I wondered whether we could further say that Jesus Christ saved all of creation not just so we can destroy it to support our addiction to our idols (fossil fuels, money, power, position, prestige, etc.).

If Jesus saved all of creation, then, perhaps, the role of the Church may need to be to bear witness to God's compassion as seen in both the Old Testament and New, and to be the beacon, even the pillar of cloud, to lead others to seek reconciliation with God and with one another.

**Proper 24 (October 22)** by Betsy Blake Bennet +  
**Isaiah 45:1-7**

Isaiah's claim that Cyrus the Great was the Lord's anointed is remarkable. Everyone else in the Bible who is referred to as God's anointed is a Jew. Cyrus was not a Jew and, as this passage tells us, he was completely unacquainted with God. While the claim that a non-Jew would be the Lord's anointed is initially surprising, even shocking, the point of the passage is that God can work through any person and any situation to accomplish God's purposes.

When we look at the challenges to social, economic, and environmental justice today, we might be discouraged. Among our political leaders are some who blatantly promote the selfish agendas of wealthy backers who don't even pretend to be interested in justice issues, while others give lip service to justice issues while acting in ways that harm the causes of justice and environmental stability. It is easy to despair when we hear about the increasing gap between economic classes or about the acceleration of global warming and its effects on people who often are already among the world's poorest.

Imagine the despair of being in exile from Israel and hearing that Cyrus's army was approaching. Cyrus had no interest in the God of Israel and might be expected to continue to keep the people in exile from their home and the center of their religion and culture. What sort of hardship would they endure under this new conqueror?

Cyrus, however, had discovered that the administration of a sprawling empire was made easier when the religions and customs of the people were respected. Cyrus didn't know God or understand the Jewish religion, but he did know that things would be easier for him and his empire if he didn't interfere with what the people in his territories valued the most. Rather than make things worse for the Israelites, he was the means to the end of their exile and the restoration of Israel.

God can take the most unlikely people and situations and use them for good. Sometimes this involves a conversion experience, as with the conversion of Paul, and sometimes it involves someone who gives no thought to God at any point of their life.

God is present even when God seems absent. God is the God of history, and even when things look completely hopeless to us, through faith we can have a deeper hope in knowing that God is at work.

**Proper 24 (October 22) by Betsy Blake Bennet +  
Psalm 96**

Psalm 96 is a joyful Psalm, full of descriptions of what it is like when all nations and people sing to God and acknowledge the living God as the sovereign of the world.

What does this Psalm say to those followers of Jesus who are trying to live into God's kingdom by advocating for environmental, economic, and social justice?

The Psalm gives the promise that God will judge the world with righteousness and truth. In other words, righteousness and truth have the last say, which places advocates for truth and justice among those who are working in harmony with God's purposes. In fact, all of creation rejoices — “the trees of the wood shout for joy” — when the Lord comes to the earth. The welfare of humankind and the welfare of the rest of creation are interconnected.



The joyful promise of this Psalm is encouraging to everyone who works for justice. If our work for justice is in harmony with God's purposes, then even when we feel unable to make any difference in an unjust world, we know that ultimately justice will prevail. The response of the seas, fields, and trees, of the natural world, to

God's purpose of righteousness and truth points toward the important interconnection between social justice and environmental justice. When the hallmark of human relationships is integrity, the entire ecosystem rejoices; when humans act with righteousness, the natural world that sustains human life thrives.

Can we change the world, or should we give up and accept injustice and environmental degradation as somehow necessary components of our world? Psalm 96 gives us reason to keep trying even when change seems impossible. With God's help, we can change the world, and if we act out of a prayerful grounding in God's promises, we will be working with God and God will be working with us.

**Proper 24 (October 22) by Betsy Blake Bennet +  
I Thessalonians 1:1-10**

“For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God...”

Paul's greeting at the beginning of his letter to the Thessalonians commends these new Christians for setting a good example for others, turning to "a living and true God" from idols. The idols that the Thessalonians had worshiped before receiving the Gospel were statues — literal idols — but our understanding of idolatry today counts worshipping or giving priority to anything other than the living God as idol worship.

Giving God first priority entails loving our neighbors and caring for God's creation. We cannot at the same time love God and hate other people, and we cannot at the same time love God and lay waste to God's creation.

Paul not only commends the Thessalonians' own choices in turning away from idols, but he also commends their sharing of their faith by word and example throughout their part of the world. Moreover, even though the first converts at Thessalonica were persecuted, Paul says they "received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit".

The believers in Thessalonica had received the Gospel with joy despite the persecution awaiting believers. They shared their faith — Paul writes "the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you" — with no guarantee that anyone with whom they had contact would accept what they said.

In the same way, our hearts may be so stirred by Jesus's love that we choose to share our faith with others. If we love our neighbors in today's world, sharing Jesus's love includes standing with people in need, with people who experience injustice because of who they are, and, in a time of climate change, with those whose homes, livelihoods, and lives are threatened by rising seas, melting permafrost, droughts, floods, and extreme temperatures. Yet just as the Thessalonians shared their faith with some people who not only didn't want to listen to them but instead persecuted them, we have no guarantee that others will hear us or even be civil to us when we share the news of Jesus's love in a hurting world.

But God calls us to share the Good News in word and action even when those who hear or read our words won't listen. Speaking when our words have little chance of being well received is difficult, but if we keep silent in the face of dismissal or derision — or even persecution — and pretend we don't follow Jesus, we prioritize our own comfort and security over our love of God.

How does the example of the Thessalonians openly turning to God from idols and proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed speak to us today? What other priorities tempt us away from the living God? What Gospel words of justice and compassion are we called to proclaim in our words and actions that might not be well received by everyone with whom we have contact?

**Proper 24 (October 22)** by Betsy Blake Bennet +  
**Matthew 22: 15-22**

“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

It’s clear that the coin with the image of the emperor’s head on it belongs to the emperor, but what belongs to God? All of creation belongs to God, from the seas to the mountains, from the smallest single-celled creatures to the whales, from the most serene wilderness area to the loudest, most congested cities. The coin with the emperor’s head on it is itself made from materials that belong to God; the emperor has taken them for his own, unaware or uncaring of the fact that no matter whose image gets stamped on the coin, God’s fingerprints of ownership are all over it. All things come from God. All things are connected to God the Creator and to each other.

We sometimes act as if we can separate the things that belong to God from things over which we have ultimate authority. God has given us stewardship over God’s creation, but God is still the Creator and ultimate authority over everything. We are to act on God’s behalf, as God’s agents, to care for creation. Our hubris leads us sometimes to act as if we consider religious or holy things as the only things that belong to God. Even if we expand our awareness of God’s ownership beyond the church doors to “creation care”, we might still make the mistake of acting as if the every day stuff of life — our businesses, cities, shopping, political assemblies and courts, entertainment, and so forth — are somehow set apart from God’s creation.

We use the term “creation care” to talk about caring for our air, water, and soils, for working for climate stability, and for trying to save endangered species. Creation care certainly entails all of those things, but limiting our idea of the care of God’s creation to these things only makes two spiritual errors. First, it supposes that God is smaller than God is, that God’s creation is limited to the things we consider either “natural” or “holy”, and not to built or human made elements of our world. Thinking of God in a way that diminishes God and assigns authority of big pieces of our lives to something else is idolatry. Second, in separating the “holy” or “natural” things that belong to God from everything else, we tend to separate ourselves from God and from much of God’s creation. This distorts our relationship “with God, with other people, and with all creation” — the very definition of sin in the Catechism in *The Book of Common Prayer*.



Matthew tells us that the Pharisees asked this question about the coin because they were plotting to entrap Jesus. What things in our lives entrap us into compartmentalizing or separating our daily concerns from God’s Church and God’s Creation? What spiritual disciplines and actions on behalf of environmental, economic, and social justice might help us overcome our tendency to think in a way that harms our relationship with God?