



**Call to Worship - Romans 12:14-16** : Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

**Hymn - 74 - For the music of creation**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npMafZkXGu4>

For the music of creation,  
for the song your Spirit sings,  
for your sound's divine expression,  
burst of joy in living things:  
God, our God, the world's  
composer,  
hear us, echoes of your voice -  
music is your art, your glory,  
let the human heart rejoice!

Psalms and symphonies exalt you,  
drum and trumpet, string and  
reed,  
simple melodies acclaim you,  
tunes that rise from deepest need,  
hymns of longing and belonging,  
carols from a cheerful throat,  
lilt of lullaby and love song  
catching heaven in a note.

All the voices of the ages  
in transcendent chorus meet,  
worship lifting up the senses,  
hands that praise, and dancing  
feet;  
over discord and division  
music speaks your joy and peace,  
harmony of earth and heaven,  
song of God that cannot cease!

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**Prayer : Prayer of adoration and approach**

God our Father, at the beginning of this Creationtide, we come praising you for the glory of creation and thanking you for the gifts of life that sustain us. You feed us and you care for us, watching over us even when we are not aware of your presence. God of the extraordinary beauty of the natural world and the splendour of the immeasurable heavens, accept our praise, our worship, and the adoration of our grateful hearts.

*William Glasse*

**In silence and storm**

Come, all who are weary, tired of noise and endless chatter, the constant hum of a world always plugged in.  
Come, all who are exhausted, burnt out by the relentless demand of tending a fire that has long since gone cold.  
Come, all who are longing for dry land, battered by the storms of life, worn down by the wind and rain of the vast open sea.  
Come, all who long for peace, for calm deeper than silence, for the tender sound of God's still small voice.  
Come, let us worship the one who meets us now in silence, as in storm, whose presence is our peace.

*Jonnie Hill ©The United Reformed Church*

**Confession and Assurance of Pardon**

Loving God, we hear your invitation to come. We hear your promises of relief, your offer to quench our thirst, and yet we find it hard to accept the blessings you offer us. We find it tantalisingly difficult to admit our own need. In this season, when we wonder at the extraordinary bounty of creation, we confess our part in the wider despoiling of creation and the excessive exploitation of the resources of Earth. As we confess our sins, we pray that you will grant us the wisdom to see how we must change, in order to pass on to our children and our children's children a planet that is not blackened by our unnecessarily heavy footsteps. As we turn to you in repentance, assure us again of our pardon and of the amazing potential of your healing love. Hear the good news: "God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven, renewed, and called again to live as people of hope. Thanks be to God. Amen."

*William Glasse*

**Lord's Prayer** : Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

**Responsive Reading - Psalm 105:1-6 God's Faithfulness to Israel**

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

*Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.*

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually.

*Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgements he has uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.*

## Introduction to theme - Creationtide - Joys and Responsibilities

Creationtide runs from 1 September to 4 October, the feast of Saint Francis. During this time, many of our churches will celebrate the traditional Harvest Thanksgiving, but we are encouraged to spend the whole season focusing on both the joys and the responsibilities of our place in creation. God has given us so much, and we cannot take for granted what we have without playing our part in responding to his call to live responsibly. This theme raises all sorts of conflicting issues for us, some of which we will explore during the course of this service.

We will hear of the call of Moses by God before a bush that burns yet is not consumed by fire. We will hear Jesus warning his disciples that he must make his way to the cross: not a scene of destruction, but one that points towards renewal. And we will share in a psalm that praises God for the past and for all his gifts to us.

The selection from Psalm 105 that we read is only part of what is set in the lectionary for today. In addition, there is a shorter section dealing with the present: God's provision and our unreliability. Finally, there is the sending of Moses and Aaron to be those who would encourage God's people to do better in abiding by his laws and statutes. You may like to read Psalm 105: 23-26 and 45 later.

**Hymn - 473 - Moses, I know you're the man** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr7YZ203UVI>

'Moses, I know you're the man,'  
The Lord said.  
'You're going to work out my plan,'  
The Lord said.  
'Lead all the Israelites out of slavery,  
And I shall make them a wandering race  
Called the People of God.  
*So every day We're on our way,  
For we're a travelling, wandering race,  
We're the people of God.*

'Don't get too set in your ways,'  
The Lord said,  
'Each step is only a phase,'  
The Lord said,  
'I'll go before you and I shall be a sign  
To guide my travelling, wandering race,  
You're the people of God.' *Chorus*

'No matter what you may do,'  
The Lord said,  
'I shall be faithful and true,'

The Lord said,  
'My love will strengthen you as you go along,  
For you're my travelling, wandering race,  
You're the people of God.' *Chorus*

'Look at the birds in the air,'  
The Lord said,  
'They fly unhampered by care,'  
The Lord said,  
'You will move easier if you're travelling light,  
For you're a wandering, vagabond race,  
You're the people of God.' *Chorus*

'Foxes have places to go'  
The Lord said,  
'But I've no home here below,'  
The Lord said,  
'So if you want to be with me all your days,  
Keep up the moving and travelling on,  
You're the people of God.' *Chorus*

*Estelle White (born 1925) © 1969 Stainer & Bell Ltd and  
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## Reading - Exodus 3:1-15 Moses at the Burning Bush

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I

have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

**The Divine Name Revealed** : But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."' God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you": This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.

#### **Reading - Matthew 16:21-28 Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection**

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

**The Cross and Self-Denial** : Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

#### **Hymn - 452 - Show me the way of the cross once again**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGGeeDPJFnc>

Show me the way of the cross once again,  
Denying myself for the love that I've gained.  
Everything's You now, everything's changed;  
It's time You had my whole life,  
You can have it all.  
*Yes, I resolve to give it all;  
Some things must die, some things must live,  
Not 'what can I gain', but 'what can I give'.  
If much is required when much is received,  
Then You can have my whole life,  
Jesus, have it all.*

I've given like a beggar but lived like the rich,  
And crafted myself a more comfortable cross.  
Yet what I am called to is deeper than this;  
It's time You had my whole life,  
You can have it all.  
*Refrain*

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#### **Sermon - Keeping balance (Matthew 16:27b)**

*He [Jesus] will repay everyone for what has been done.*

Creationtide invites us to look again at the world God has made: not as scenery in the background of human life, but as the wide and generous home in which God has placed us. The music of creation is not simply something we hear in birdsong, wind, water, harvest fields, gardens, and sea. It is something in which we are invited to take our part. We are creatures among creatures, blessed with wonder, entrusted with responsibility, and called to live before God with humility.

This is not about trees, flowers, and beautiful sunsets alone. This theme includes truthfulness, justice, patience, and love. We live at a time when almost everyone is aware of climate pressure and global warming. We have heard the warnings. We have seen the changes in weather patterns, the strain on land and water, and the vulnerability of communities whose lives are affected first and most severely.

Whatever we think about the scale of the impact of human activity on creation, climate change is self-evident. The use of finite resources is relentless and whatever the motivation for change, whatever individuals believe, we remain the people entrusted to care for God's precious gift.

In this country we can rightly acknowledge that much has been done to reduce emissions. The United Kingdom's territorial greenhouse gas emissions have fallen substantially since 1990, according to official statistics. That progress matters, and we should be grateful for every serious effort made by governments, businesses, communities, churches, individuals and households.

But gratitude is not the same as self-righteousness. It is easy to look elsewhere and say, "Why have they not done what we have done?" It is easy to blame people in other countries, especially when their economies are still developing, their populations are larger, their resources are fewer, or their histories have been shaped by poverty and exploitation.

There is a kind of moral laziness that dresses itself up as environmental concern but quietly becomes judgement of others. Christian discipleship calls us to something better: honest responsibility without arrogance, urgency without contempt, and repentance without despair.

The story of Moses at the burning bush helps us begin in the right place. Moses sees a bush that is blazing, yet it is not consumed. I have read various attempts to explain this. Whatever the cause, we know that fire normally devours what it touches. It uses up its fuel before it burns out, leaving ash behind. On the special mountain, Moses sees flame without destruction.

Moses turns away in his surprise; he finds he is on 'holy ground'. I would like to know what adjective from our current vocabulary Moses might have used to express what he saw; the language would be extreme. Before the task is described, God shows Moses what his power and presence look like. He will be sent to Pharaoh, but first he must learn that he is standing before the living God and it is in that knowledge that he gains the capability to act rightly and as God wants him to act.

Our response to creation needs to be broader than fear, guilt, or anger, although those are understandable in the face of what is going on and the urgency some of us see in the present day. We need wonder too. We need to see that the world is not merely a problem to be managed, but a gift to be received. The bush was not devoured. The presence of God did not annihilate creation but filled it with holiness. God's power is not like careless human power, which consumes and discards. God's power sustains, calls, liberates, and gives life.

Then God speaks. "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry." The holy God is not remote from suffering. The God who meets Moses in fire is also the God who notices slave labour, oppression, fear, hunger, and tears.

God provides for his people after their misery in Egypt, not because Moses is impressive, nor because Israel has solved its own crisis, but because God is faithful. Creationtide must never become a sentimental celebration that forgets human misery. The care of creation and the care of the poor belong together. The cry of the earth and the cry of the vulnerable must not be set against one another.

Moses then asks the question many of us ask when we sense the scale of our calling: "Who am I?" Who am I to speak? Who am I to change anything? Who am I to take responsibility? God's answer is not a flattering account of Moses' abilities. God says, "I will be with you."

And when Moses asks God's name, God replies, "I am who I am." It is a mysterious answer, which is its strength. God is not a slogan. God is not a theory we can control. God is the One who simply is: faithful, present, free, powerful, and beyond our possession. We do not need to explain God before we obey him. We need to trust the God who says, "I will be with you."

That trust shapes the balance we need. On one side, we must not shrug our shoulders and say that nothing can be done. Moses could have remained with the sheep. But God sent him. On the other side, we must not imagine that we are the saviours of the world. Moses did not deliver Israel by his own brilliance. He was sent by God, accompanied by God, and corrected by God. Christian action is neither apathy nor self-importance. It is faithful obedience.

Paul says something similar in Romans. "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good." Genuine love is not vague niceness. It points out wrongdoing. It does not bless exploitation, wastefulness, cruelty, or indifference. But Paul continues: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty."

There is the balance. Love must react properly in the face of wrongdoing, but it must not become hatred of people. It must not become contempt. It must not become the proud assumption that we alone are wise.

That is a word for our public life, our online life, and our church life. We can oppose what damages creation without despising those who disagree with us. We can challenge injustice without forgetting mercy. We can recognise progress in our own country without using it as a platform from which to look down on others. We can ask hard questions about policy, consumption, travel, food, energy, and finance, while remembering that the people involved are still our neighbours.

Paul's vision is not soft. It is demanding. "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good." Then, in Matthew, Jesus turns our eyes towards the cross. Peter cannot bear the thought of Jesus suffering. It seems that he wants an unachievable ideal, namely, a Messiah without a cross, victory without self-denial, life without loss.

Jesus is clear; it cannot be like that. This is not a world of idealism, but of misery, challenge and heartbreak. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." The cross is the ultimate act of self-giving love. It is not destruction for destruction's sake. It is costly love poured out for the life of the world. In Jesus, we see that God's way of saving is not domination, blame, or avoidance, but self-giving faithfulness.

So what might it mean for us to take up the cross in Creationtide? It may mean accepting that some habits must change. It may mean giving up the comfort of easy blame. It may mean choosing to hope when fear is easier, and choosing patience when anger feels more satisfying. It may mean asking what we can give rather than what we can gain. It may mean living more simply, praying more honestly, listening more carefully, and acting more consistently. None of these things earns God's love. They are ways of responding to it.

Jesus says, "He will repay everyone for what has been done." That is not a threat designed to bludgeon us into a different way of thinking and living. It is a reminder that what we do matters. Our choices are not meaningless. Our responsibilities are real. Our love can be genuine. Our repentance can bear fruit. Our worship can lead to faithfulness. And because God is "I am who I am," because God hears the cry of the oppressed, because Christ has gone through the cross to resurrection, we do not act alone.

Creation is bigger than us, and that is part of its joy. We are not the centre of everything. We are not asked to carry the whole world as though we were God. But we are asked to take our place within God's purposes: grateful for the blessings of creation, honest about the damage done, humble about our own part, generous towards others, and courageous in love.

May God give us that balance: wonder and responsibility, truth and mercy, self-denial and joy. And may the fire of God's presence burn among us, not to consume, but to make holy, to send, and to renew. Amen.

#### **Hymn -615 - Let love be real, in giving and receiving**

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,  
without the need to manage and to own;  
a haven free from posing and pretending,  
where every weakness may be safely known.  
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,  
give me your love wherever we may go:  
as God loves us, so let us love each other,  
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,  
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;  
that helps us face the risk of truly living,  
and makes us brave to be what we might be.  
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,  
give me your love in spite of all you know:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfRN5dDkym5>

as God loves us, so let us love each other,  
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, with no manipulation,  
no secret wish to harness or control;  
let us accept each other's incompleteness,  
and share the joy of learning to be whole.  
Give me your hope through dreams and  
disappointments,  
give me your trust when all my failings show:  
as God loves us, so let us love each other,  
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Michael Forster (born 1946) © 1995 Kevin Mayhew Ltd

**Dedication of Offering** : God who gives without reserve, We bring our gifts, Sometimes hesitatingly, Responding in love to love. Take all that we are and bring, bless and use all in your work, for the honour and glory of your name and the life of your Church. Amen.

*William Glasse*

**Prayers of Intercession** : Gracious God, we bring before you the needs of your world, the burdens of your people, and the responsibilities you place upon us within your creation. Give us humble hearts, honest courage, and genuine love, that we may seek justice, cherish mercy, and play our part in your renewing work.

*William Glasse*

Creative and radiant God, your strong and sure light is never overcome by darkness. May it be so in this our time. Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, in your mercy and grace you surprisingly said to us, "You are the light of the world." May it be so in this our time. Spirit of light and love, kindle in us fresh urgency to love and serve the human family, to be amazed by creation and to care for it well, to pursue justice and offer mercy, to rejoice in receiving and sharing grace. In confidence and hope, we pray. Amen.

*Hope Morgan Ward, UMC Council of Bishops © The Methodist Church*

**Touching the sacred** : Holy ground of our being, We long to feel you in the marrow of our days, To glimpse you in the ordinary stuff of life: The glow of morning light through a window, The brush of a breeze carrying whispers of hope, The laughter of a friend stirring our soul. You are the heartbeat in our stillness, The thread weaving meaning through every moment. And yet we can wander, unaware of your present, Too hurried, too heavy, too hesitant. Draw us closer to you, O God. Open our eyes to the wonders you sprinkle before us: The hum of life on a bee's wing, The warmth of a cuppa in our hands, The quiet courage in another's mercy. May our yearning shape us and our longing be a prayer until we find ourselves immersed in you. Holy One, beyond words, yet within our reach.

*Jessica Ascroft-Townsley ©The United Ref Church*

And now we continue with prayers for the needs that have been raised, and for the ways in which creation's current situation affects our thinking, our living, and our loving. Father, we pray for the impact of climate change on our brothers and sisters all around the world. We think of those living in places where sea levels are rising, where temperatures are increasing to levels that are unsustainable for life, and where the outcome is fire blazing through forest, heath and property. And God, we pray for all those who are struggling to live their lives, whether because of climate change or because of their own personal circumstances. We pray for people living with poverty, and for people living with illness. We pray for those who are adapting to lifelong disabilities, and for those learning to overcome temporary setbacks. Be with us all, and help all to know that they are supported by the people around them, and always loved by you. We bring all our prayers to God for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### **Hymn - 77 - Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1m9I7vHYZ0>

Give thanks to the Lord,  
our God and King:  
his love endures forever.  
For he is good, he is above all things:  
his love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise.

With a mighty hand  
and an outstretched arm:  
his love endures forever.  
For the life that's been reborn:  
his love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise,  
sing praise, sing praise.  
*Forever, God is faithful,  
forever God is strong.*

*Forever God is with us,  
forever, forever.*

From the rising to the setting sun:  
his love endures forever.  
By the grace of God, we will carry on:  
his love endures forever.  
Sing praise, sing praise,  
sing praise, sing praise.  
*Refrain*

*Chris Tomlin (born 1972) © 2000 worshiptogether.com  
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**Dismissal and Blessing** : Let our faith in you, O Lord, be ever stronger, our life with you ever deeper, our praying ever more awake to your glory, our hold on you ever firmer and our love for you ever increasing. *William Bramwell, Methodist itinerant preacher (1759-1818) © The Methodist Church*

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.