Climate justice sermon pack

Thank you for downloading this climate justice sermon pack for use during Christian Aid Week and throughout the year. We hope it inspires and helps you undertake the urgent task of preaching about climate justice.

We offer four sets of sermon notes to assist you in the task of declaring another narrative. The first two sets of sermon notes are based on the Revised Common Lectionary for Christian Aid Week Sunday (10 May). The last two sets are based on the Old Testament prophets of Micah and Hosea. An accompanying order of service on the theme of the Song of the Prophets is also available, as are many other resources exploring climate justice at caweek.org/resources

‘We preachers have an opportunity to declare that there is another narrative out of which we can live our lives. It is a narrative of generosity, and freedom, and forgiveness, and hospitality, and justice. It is the narrative of the future.’

Walter Brueggemann
Old Testament scholar and theologian

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Kenya

In February 2017, the Kenyan Government declared a national drought emergency. With 2.7 million people without enough food, the drought is said to be the worst in decades.

Droughts are now more frequent and more intense due to the climate crisis. Without a reliable source of water, many communities are struggling to survive.

In Kitui county, eastern Kenya, 8 out of 10 people depend on rain to grow crops both for food and to earn a living. Without enough water, staple crops like maize and beans wither up and die. In the drought, people can't grow crops, which means they can't earn a living. Instead they go hungry.

Drought forces people to walk further and further to collect water. This daily burden robs them of the chance to farm and grow food for their families.

Elderly women and children are especially vulnerable on these dangerous journeys and can face robbery or even conflict as people battle over scarce resources.

Cows, sheep and goats are becoming weaker and weaker in the drought and can't produce milk or be sold. People are struggling to cope. Lives are at risk.

1 Stories

Rose

Rose is 67. Every day, she battles to bring water home for her grandchildren because of prolonged drought. Drought and hunger are driving her to the brink.

‘The drought has been severe,’ she tells us. ‘We have had three long months without water, and now we have to walk long distances. We are suffering.’

Drought is causing a hunger crisis. Crops wither and die. Rivers are bone dry. People are struggling to survive.

Rose strives to provide for her grandchildren. She does all she can to give them happy childhoods, like the times she remembers when there was plenty of food. The sad truth is, it doesn’t have to reach this breaking point.

There is an earth dam just minutes away from her home. It should be a lifeline. But many people in Kenya, just like Rose, are struggling to survive the drought. With such dire need, every last drop of water in the dam has dried up.

This is Rose’s climate crisis. No matter how hard she battles against it, drought leaves her and her grandchildren hungry.

The rains are due to come any day now. Rose and her community need our support to help prepare the dam to capture the water, so not a single drop is wasted. The bigger and better the dam, the more water they can capture.

With a dam full of water, Rose would be free from her long, painful journeys. She’d have time to grow fresh vegetables for her family to eat. And she could see her grandchildren grow up and live life in all its fullness.
Florence

Florence is full of life, love and laughter. The women in her farming group look up to her. She’s courageous, kind – a survivor.

A few years ago, her husband died, leaving her a widow. At that time, she had no water to grow crops. Her children were hungry. She had to walk for hours on dangerous journeys to collect water. ‘Life was miserable,’ she told us.

But things have changed for Florence. Next to her farm, Florence is proud to show us something remarkable – a dam, full of fresh water.

It’s thanks to your donations that Florence and her community have built this water dam, with the help of our partner Anglican Development Services – Eastern (ADSE), just a short walk away from her village.

With this dam, Florence can grow tomatoes, onions and chillies on her farm. With this dam, her children can eat healthy, nutritious vegetables. It’s her source of life and joy.

Florence also uses the water from the dam to keep honey bees. She sells the rich, golden honey for cash at the market. Now, Florence is reaping a good life for herself and her family.

Sadly, millions of people in Kenya are desperately struggling to survive the drought. It’s now a national emergency. You can help another community build a dam. Many more people will have the water they need to sustain their families. By encouraging your congregation to give generously, we can help more people like Florence to thrive.

If you’ve ordered the church collection envelope for Christian Aid Week, you’ll see there is an option to find out more about giving regularly to Christian Aid. Regular giving is vitally important because it is your chance to stand together with the communities we support worldwide at any given point and make a lasting difference. A regular gift from you would help us be there for people like Florence in the long term.
Stones and strongholds

Readings
Psalm 31 and Acts 7:55-60

Turbulent times (Psalm 31)

• The psalmist cries out in a time of deep distress, and the first four verses paint a troubled portrait in a turbulent landscape. Rich thought-fodder not to be rushed past. To be shamed was to be in exile, cut off from community and opportunity. It strikes a much deeper chord than our current definition and the preacher needs to unpack the emotion and visceral cry.

• Rose and Florence’s stories (this Christian Aid Week) embody strength and resilience in the face of the turbulent times of climate chaos and the persistent poverty it exacerbates. The strong earth dam in Florence’s community is a refuge and fortress in the face of drought. Such refuge is not available for Rose, who has to battle continuing uncertainty, walking 8km for water, a six-hour hike, hoping it will be there.

• How might refuge and deliverance be provided for those who have least to do with causing this climate crisis yet face its brutal onslaught first and most furiously? How do we help right the wrongs inflicted on those most vulnerable?

Praying, campaigning and sharing

As the body of Christ, we stand in solidarity with global neighbours when we respond to the cry of distress. In our prayers, campaigning and sharing.

• Pray. Join the Christian Aid prayer chain, underpinning this crucial year for climate justice, and pray with communities from around the world, for wisdom and to demand more than refuge for our sisters and brothers trapped in poverty and bearing the brunt of the climate crisis. Find out more at caid.org.uk/prayerchain or caid.ie/prayerchain if you’re in Northern Ireland.

• Campaign. Lobby our government to set and meet climate targets that keep global warming below 1.5 degrees, calling for a new deal for climate justice by signing our petition online at caid.org.uk/climatejusticepetition

(There is also a campaign card at the back of the seven-day devotional for Christian Aid Week).

We can also devote ourselves daily to sustainable lifestyle choices.

• Share. £5 could buy a shovel to build an earth dam; £10 could buy a pair of taps at a water point installed at an earth dam; £440 could provide seeds and teach 100 farmers how to plant drought-tolerant crops that can survive dry spells. Whatever you can give (this Christian Aid Week) can help make a difference to those who are suffering the most but have done the least to cause the climate crisis.

Envelopes are also available for you to give and to share with others to encourage their giving too. On the Christian Aid Week church collection envelope there is an option to find out more about giving regularly to Christian Aid. Regular giving helps us be there for people like Rose in the long term.

Systemic change

• There is a challenge in these verses to reflect on what in our own lives we might need to be delivered from.

• Many hold shame for what they regard the hypocrisy of their lifestyles in the face of the climate crisis. They feel they are too dependent on their cars or enjoy their annual overseas trip too much to raise their voice to challenge investment in fossil fuels. Their shame silences their calls for justice.

• Or some are perhaps oblivious to the nets of the social and economic system we are caught in that we all need to be delivered from. The nets of privilege and power we don’t even know have claimed us that we might need to be released from.

• May God deliver us from the silence of shame or the avoidance of our complicity. In acknowledging our part, may we do all we can to bring about the deep and necessary changes needed so all might know climate justice and fullness of life.
Prophetic voice (Acts 7:55-60)

• Deep imagery wraps itself around timeless messages in this sad, violent story in Acts, but they need unearthing. The lectionary text offers only the end of Stephen’s story, but lessons are buried in the background layers to this account and will help the story resonate.

• ‘Followers of the way’ (referring to the first followers of the resurrected Jesus) were still very much part of the synagogue, but their teaching was not wholly welcome and there was internal tension. Stephen was a new leader, chosen by the fledgling ‘Christian’ community and commissioned by the twelve. As follower numbers grew, sharing became more challenging, so he and six others were responsible for the equitable distribution of food.

• In the Acts account, Stephen’s outspoken vision and passion came into challenge with traditional religious leaders, who accused him of blasphemy. Brought before the Council and the High Priest, Stephen defended himself; but his defence proved to be his downfall.

• Following the line of prophets, naming Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David, he argued that obedience to God called those prophets to change and journey, to push against established norms. ‘Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?’ (Acts 7:52) he asks, and that challenge infuriated the Establishment. They drove him out and stoned him.

• ‘History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes’ (attributed to Mark Twain). So what messages do we hear echoing?

Standing with and listening to

• Verses 55-56 offer an iconic vision, Jesus standing at God’s right hand – a familiar image, but with a twist. Elsewhere in our sacred text, Jesus sits at the right hand, a sign and symbol of authority and power; yet, Stephen sees him standing – not a passive judge, but an active advocate. Linking to the theme of climate justice, are we too called not to judge but to act?

• In verse 57, the crowd cover their ears and refuse to hear, blocking out what they don’t want to hear, shouting and rushing to silence an inconvenient truth. Today, powerful companies who profit from fossil fuels and feed our consumption, offer green-washing platitudes while ploughing more resources into silencing their critics than into addressing their carbon footprint. Today, our sisters and brothers living on the sharp edge of this climate crisis have a different message to share. Will we listen? Will we magnify their voices or rush ahead, refusing to hear?

• The seemingly offhand reference to laying their coats at Saul’s feet in verse 58 is not only a reference to Paul, but Saul/Paul is the official overseer of this official execution. The imagery of the stoning reaches across generations and asks hard questions: What violence do we dress up in official channels as ‘business as usual’? When ‘powers that be’ begin the onslaught, does it become easier to join in? Whose coats are we holding and what do we reveal when we take off the cloak of business, lifestyle, profit and power?

Rose, Florence and all the Earth

• Using the stories of Rose and Florence, two strong, resilient women fighting every day to survive and take care of their families, invite the congregation to consider Stephen’s footnote mention in Acts. What truths are being drowned out by an angry crowd who don’t want to be challenged? Where are we in the story now? Where do we need to be?

• Ironically, in our story, stones embody violence. They’re held in the hands of those refusing to change, who are fearful of lost power and privilege. Yet for Rose and Florence, stones can represent a lifeline, not a death sentence. Stones used to create a dam won’t stop their climate crisis, but they can offer refuge and deliverance from the immediate emergency.

• Together, we can build resilience. Together we can help communities adapt. Together, we can push politicians and pull economic levers, moving us away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy. Together we can curb the over-consumption that is driving climate breakdown. Together we can work with creation and allow nature to be the agent of its own restoration. Together we can be the change we need to stop this climate crisis.

• Verses 59-60 circle back to beginning, with Stephen continuing to offer his entire being to God. He died speaking the same words Jesus said at the end: ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ The earth never stops bearing witness to God, even while we abuse it and harm the ones we share it with. Rose and Florence, while constantly struggling, continue to hope and their stories call us to join them.

With thanks to the Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, Head of Christian Aid Scotland, for her insights on these passages.
Sermon notes
Based on the Revised Common Lectionary for Christian Aid Week Sunday (10 May)

What we are already given

Readings
1 Peter 2:2-10 and John 14:1-14

Urgent cries (1 Peter 2:2-10)

• Newborn infants don’t mess around. Their cries are unreasonable, impatient: the only thing that can fob off a hungry baby is a feed; and for newborns, this first feed of a new life can be the most vital of all. In common with other mammals, the first milk or colostrum of the newborn human is a wondrous kickstart to the processes of life – which are endangered without it. What we are already given, when it is rightly valued, may be what we would otherwise search for in vain.

• The Greek of Peter’s letter is sharply to the point: getting the writer’s transformative message across is urgent, decisive, life-and-death, and not to be diluted or slowed down with gooey images of sweet, safe and satisfied babies, resting, at ease, rather than following-on to the next stage of necessary nourishment.

• This does not mean that a sense of urgency for the basic needs of life lessens with growing older. The wisdom of age that Rose and Florence exemplify (in the Christian Aid Week stories) testify to this. Rose’s hard work and Florence’s generous compassion are sustaining for others, though not without cost, and not without their receiving of our support.

• Urgency, though, is the penny that is so often slowest to drop when we hear of neighbours at the sharper end of the climate crisis than we may be ourselves.

Every. Last. Drop.

• Do we appreciate the finality of that last drop of water, when we can turn on a tap at any time? The climate crisis is global, and in helping others like Rose and her community to preserve every last drop of water when the rains do come, we also spiritually prepare ourselves for radical changes and sacrifices ahead, in our society and in our churches.

• What is doubly striking is that the change needed for Rose and realised by Florence, is achieved by resorting to resources freely available: sand, rock, collaboration and commitment. What we are already given, when it is rightly valued, may be what we would otherwise search for in vain.

Living stones

• The rich imagery of stones and rocks in 1 Peter 2, that build but also block, shelter and protect, finds meaning in the material of the dams in Kenya which, in holding water, enable the enrichment of diet and the alleviation of drudgery. This opens up not only a more fruitful and rewarding use of time, but the enjoyment of life and family, or age, as well as youth. Who would begrudge such gifts of God?

• As we learn from Florence’s concern for her immediate neighbours, a right response to gift is to ask why others are still in need. This, perhaps, is the essence of ‘holy priesthood’: not obstructing or hiding what God wishes to make obvious, but ensuring the flow of the know-how of the goodness of God, together building relationship and partnership with God and Creation. In such togetherness, the church discovers their identity: in mutual enrichment, rather than one-sided giving.

• We look for joy, rather than pain in the giving that is integral to our faith, as a response to our own experience of God’s goodness. Yet again, in this, we learn from Florence’s gratitude when she proclaims: ‘I am thankful to people who have donated to build this earth dam. I am praying God will increase their giving.’ We have the opportunity to answer her prayer this Christian Aid Week through the envelopes provided for our contributions and that we can give to others also (if using this sermon as part of Christian Aid Week). Or through giving regularly to Christian Aid to ensure their partners can respond wherever and whenever the need is greatest.
Building a common home (John 14:1-14)

• The house-of-multiple-occupation (Oikia) described in John 14 needs to be shaken free of its setting in funerals and its post-mortem resonance in our culture. This is a passage that might have inspired Christian Aid’s vintage strapline, ‘We believe in life before death,’ with ‘life in all its fullness’ (John 10:10) added in for good measure.

• The ‘Father’s House’ is a building of community life, perhaps shaped through the variety of the ‘living stones’ of the church, and its accommodation of diversity is striking. We are asked to trust that a place is prepared for us – and can therefore not begrudge a place for others.

• Like the ‘Common Home’ image with which Pope Francis describes our planet in Laudato Si, the ‘many dwelling-places’ of the Father’s house testify to the breadth of God’s care, and Jesus is also at pains to bring the worries of his friends, and their heaven-bound interpretation of his teaching, back down to earth.

Do not be afraid

• Finally, our reading begins with words of deep comfort: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled’ (verse one). These words are much needed for those who are feeling overwhelmed or anxious in this age of climate crisis and grief. Like today these words were spoken into a context of utmost tension, doubt, and lurking despair.

• Even with a hopeful vision and such reassuring encouragement, threat and danger still exist. Perhaps like the disciples then we also look for some sort of satisfying shortcut to a distant destination. May we too heed the call of Jesus to recognise that life is right in front of us, and that he is ready to offer help when we respond as he would do. What we are already given, when it is rightly valued, may be what we would otherwise search for in vain.

Here and now

• When we pray for God’s will to be done here on earth as in heaven, we make known our hope of a renewed earth where ‘all live in peace with God and creation, and all inhabit a space of joy, God’s and humans’. This is a vision to inspire and sustain our giving, acting and praying for climate justice here and now as we work towards the wholeness of Shalom, of the earth as God’s home (Volf and Crossaman, ‘For the life of the world’).

• We catch glimpses of this other possible world in the joyful transformation experienced by Florence and her community with the reliable provision of water in the earth dam. Such glimpses make us long even more for such security and abundance to come to pass for Rose and others enduring extreme drought in Kenya, shared in our (Christian Aid Week) stories.

• John’s Gospel proclaims that it is by God’s choice and intention that we encounter Christ the word in the here and now. We meet him in the flesh we share with fellow creatures, and the challenges of everyday life. We meet him here even if, like Philip, we are tempted to look elsewhere or simply wish things would be as reliable as they once seemed.

With thanks to the Rev David Coleman, Eco-congregations Scotland chaplain, for his insights on these passages.
Sermon notes
To accompany the Song of the Prophets order of service

The Song of the Prophets

Readings
Micah 6:1-8

Source of hope
- Christian Aid has long encouraged the church to find sources of hope so that we might be inspired to take action on the causes and consequences of climate change. (See ‘The Songs of the Prophets’ at caid.org.uk/song-prophets-report or caid.ie/song-prophets-report if you’re in Northern Ireland.)
- The biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has shown us one of the tasks of such prophets is to inspire our imagination, to offer an alternative vision in which the earth might be a different and better place, and then live that envisioned world into a reality.
- Micah is one such biblical prophet, but we might wonder if someone writing millennia before the manufacture of disposable plastic and industrial pollutants has anything to contribute as a source of hope and inspiration of action on the climate crisis?

Naming the powers
- Much like climate scientists and eco-activists have been clamouring for the attention of the world in the past few decades, Micah begins his prophecy with a message that is intended to go global: ‘Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it.’ (Micah 1:2)
- Micah names and shames the corruption of the political leaders, the dishonesty of the merchants and greed of those who control the use of land. He denounces their exploitation and oppression of people and land, he sees these social injustices as integral to the idolatry of the people of Israel, the misplaced worship and devotion to greed that religious leaders of his day have allowed to happen on their watch.
- The work of theologian Walter Wink has shown us that such naming of the systemic ‘powers’ of injustice, along with a deliberate engagement with their spiritual and material manifestations, is a necessary step towards their redemption and establishing a vision of shalom.
- As with Micah, so too climate injustice feeds upon the prolific idolatry and fallen principalities of money, power and rapacious self-interest, fuelled by the myth of perpetual growth. These false gods continue to entice the world away from a biblical vision of peace and justice and finding our place within the well-being of creation.
- If we are to imagine the better world presented to us in the ‘Song of the Prophets’, then we need to begin with naming and engaging the systemic powers that have led to the injustices that now mar creation and threaten its very existence.

Creative campaigning
- We do this not necessarily to condemn specific people, companies or practices (that is too easy and such scapegoating is rarely pretty or helpful), but to reveal their destructive directions and engage them in an imaginative and prophetic return to their true vocations.
- Micah does this memorably. Early in the prophecy his incisive metaphors and subtle innuendo play on names of the towns that perpetuate these injustices leaving the message of judgment abundantly clear. Other prophets were known to resort to creative measures to getting their point across: Jeremiah smashes jars, Ezekiel digs through walls, and Isaiah walks around naked to name a few ways they grabbed attention and emphasised their message.

Trouble is not just ahead
- According to Micah, there’s a lot of woe coming to those in power who plan injustice and plot ‘evil deeds on their beds’ (2:1), and even more trouble is on its way for those who are bribed to proclaim that everything on earth is just as God would have it and ‘no disaster’ will then befall us (3:11-12).
- Climate change disasters are not only coming, they are already upon us, not as punishment from heaven but as a direct result of our behaviour. As ever, those harmful actions originate predominantly in the global North, but most perilously impact the poorest people on the planet. The evidence Christian Aid has gathered from places like the Philippines, Kenya, Bolivia, Bangladesh and El Salvador is indisputable.
Song of the prophets

Here are four different prophetic statements. You could have four different voices read these from four different locations around the church. (See the related order of service at caweeek.org/resources)

VOICE 1: ‘I am 19-year-old Glory, from the Philippines. I live on a small island of Tabugon, Carles with my family. It’s beautiful and peaceful, with fresh air, coral reefs, and fresh seafood. But it is changing. Living on an island is very challenging. I really feel the impact of climate change. My message for the world is that we must act on the crisis of climate change. We need to be responsible. We should be concerned on protecting our surroundings because this has been created for us. We have the wisdom to know what is right and what is wrong.’

(Sherry, Philippines)

VOICE 2: ‘Only the willingly ignorant continue to deny the link between our consumerist lifestyles, climate change, and suffering in the developing world. Promoting economic growth as the answer to all our problems, and in particular global poverty, is irresponsible. We need to recognise that our current growth-oriented system is driven by powerful economic interests set on making profits, however short term.

‘… And it is just plain wrong to ignore the suffering of the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the world especially when they are the least contributors to climate change.’

(Katalina Tahaafe Williams, a theologian writing from Australia and the Pacific islands.)

VOICE 3: ‘O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! (…) Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights? Your wealthy are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, with tongues of deceit in their mouths.’ (Micah 6:3 and 11-12)

VOICE 4: Drought drives people to the brink. Storms tear families apart. Raging waters show no mercy. Our world is in crisis. We have the power to stop it. People living in poverty are on the frontline of this climate crisis. They are losing food, water, homes and family. Every day, they walk further, dig deeper and build stronger to survive. Unrelenting. Determined. They battle the worst of a climate crisis they did not create. This is unjust. But a better way is possible. A way that restores justice to our broken world today. A way that protects the future for all of us, our children and grandchildren. (Christian Aid)

The earth as judge

• God calls upon the mountains and the hills, the foundations of the earth itself as witnesses for the prosecution of Israel. Back then, nature was only called to testify to the selfishness of the people and the injustices visited upon the poor. Now creation might be summoned as a wounded and feverish victim too.

• And while we might look to our own resources and solutions in response, God presents us with a more radical challenge in those familiar words of Micah 6:8: ‘… what does God require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?’

Do justice

• God requires us to do justice with those who are the worst affected yet least responsible for the climate crisis. To amplify and join with their voices in the call for a new deal for climate justice go to caid.org.uk/climatejusticepetition

• To do justice also requires justice for the earth, to acknowledge that the raging fires, flooding rivers, devastating typhoons and species extinction are a result of the grave injustice of exploitation and neglect of the natural rhythms we must now learn to live in harmony with.

Love mercy

• God requires us to embody loving mercy and kindness. While this, of course, demands that we act with compassion for the wounded creation and for its hurting people, it also begs what may be the more difficult question: how are we to engage the fallen powers in such a way that show redeeming mercy to those who continue to reject the radical changes that are needed for a climate crisis to be averted?

• Is it to believe with hope that perhaps even the most ardent climate change-denying politician, or the most active carbon-emitting company has the potential to change. And it also offers an invitation to show ourselves mercy for any guilt we may feel for our own carbon dependency. Such mercy might save us from silent shame and allow us to loudly call for the system change needed.

Walk humbly

• Walking humbly means turning to God in prayer, in continuous and collective prayer for the planet. This year we invite you to join the Christian Aid prayert chain where together with Christians across Britain, Ireland and the world, we will bring our prayers of lament, confession, repentance, petition, intercession, praise and thanksgiving. Sign up at caid.org.uk/prayerchain or caid.ie/prayerchain if you’re in Northern Ireland.

• Joining with sisters and brothers across the world in prayer we remind ourselves that the earth is the Lord’s and in setting our hearts to seek God we galvanise our courage to do justice and love mercy as we respond to the challenge and join in the mission of God in restoring the earth.

With thanks to the Rev Dr Craig Gardiner, tutor in Christian Doctrine at South Wales Baptist College for his input on these sermon notes.
Sermon notes
To aid preaching on apocalyptic passages of the Bible.

Apocalyptic lament and hope

Readings
Hosea 4:1-3 and Hosea 2:18-23

Apocalyptic texts for today

- We are entering an era of climate chaos. The news is increasingly dominated by extreme weather events. Anxiety, grief and anger related to climate breakdown are at an all-time high.
- Recent years have seen an increase in dystopia/apocalyptic stories in popular culture, especially on television and in film.
- The prophetic apocalyptic texts in the Bible are part of the word of God. They can speak to us today if we let them.

Background to prophetic apocalyptic writing in the Hebrew Bible

- The book of Hosea is one of several prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible which draw on apocalyptic themes in order to reveal God’s purposes for God’s people.
- Apocalypse means unveiling – not necessarily offering strict predictions of the future, but a vehicle for revealing the way things are: the apocalyptic offers a God’s eye view.
- These visions have power because they capture our experience of the present, offer a vision of where that present might lead us, depending on the choices we make, and where our hope lies.
- The prophets in the Old Testament structure their visions in similar ways: announcing the sin of the people, painting a horrifying picture of the consequences of that sin, and reminding them of God’s promises (see other suggested texts to explore at the end of these notes).
- Apocalyptic writing isn’t just a dialogue between humans and God: it encompasses all things in heaven and on earth. The whole community of creation is caught up in the drama.

A warning: Hosea 4

- Hosea 4 directly links violence among the people to the reversal of the order of creation. It mirrors the creation stories in Genesis. Genesis 1 describes God commanding life to come forth from the sea, and the air, and the land. Hosea describes death coming to each of these groups in the reverse order.
- We are part of a wider community of creation, and our violence and greed has far-reaching consequences.
- For the prophets, the land is not a silent recipient of our sin. The land is noisy. It is not only a vehicle for God’s judgement. It cries out in its own right: ‘the land mourns’ – a word that also means ‘dries up’ in Hebrew. The land doesn’t just mourn in this passage in Hosea, but on eight other occasions in the prophetic literature.
- The land lamenting makes an observation about the way things are – greed and violence trigger further violence, food scarcity, and animal death.

A promise: Hosea 2

- The role of the earth in prophetic apocalyptic writing does not end with de-creation. Images of destruction and re-creation go hand in hand. The promises in Hosea 2 parallel the warning of Hosea 4.
- Is this vision realistic? Prophetic hope insists that a different world must be possible, and then insists we live as though it must be possible, even if it seems totally unreasonable in the present. Violent language, and language of grief about that violence, is a reasonable, appropriate, and realistic response to the state of the world. But visions of peace did not likely look reasonable, appropriate, or realistic to the people of Israel.
It is the prophetic task to declare peace while telling the truth about the reality of violence. Realism is an important part of prophetic work, but it can’t end there. Prophetic apocalyptic writing expresses the material truth of the danger we are in and the theological truth of the hope of God’s promises.

This promise gives us a vision of the world we work towards. In ‘Surprised by Hope’, N T Wright reflects: ‘What you do in the Lord is not in vain. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that’s about to roll over a cliff... you are... accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world. Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness... (every deed) that makes the name of Jesus honoured in the world... will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.’

How do we respond?

Declaring God’s promises of peace needs our grief and anger. Grief and anger imply an awareness of an alternative. Anger and grief are not just accurate expressions of the state of things but also a tool to provoke changed behaviour. They remind us that this violence is the result of a choice, of sin. This means it doesn’t have to be this way. It is possible to turn back.

Grief and anger must be accompanied by declaring the world of peace God has promised. The world of peace painted by the apocalyptic prophets gives us the courage to change.

Other examples of texts to explore this theme:

- **Jeremiah 4:19-28**: The land mourns and falls apart because of the sin of the people.
- **Isaiah 24:1-13**: The sins of the people and the resulting devastation of the earth.
- **Amos 9**: Destruction of the land because of injustice against the poor (see Amos 8 for context) and restoration to the land.
- **Isaiah 35:1-4**: Restoration of the desert and the people.
- **Isaiah 11:1-9 and 65:21-25**: The Peaceable Kingdom.

With thanks to Hannah Malcolm for the insights from Hosea. Hannah is currently training for ordination in the Church of England. She is also doing a PhD on theologies of climate/ecological grief and working on a new SCM Press edited collection of theologies of climate grief from across the global church.
6 Action points for response

Pray
Pray for climate justice. Join in with our powerful prayer movement for climate justice at caid.org.uk/prayerchain or caid.ie/prayerchain if you’re in Northern Ireland.

Act
Take action for climate justice. Call for a new deal for the climate at caid.org.uk/climatejusticepetition

You can also find printable petitions and other resources at caid.org.uk/climate-justice-resource

Give
Give for climate justice. Regular giving enables us to stand together with communities worldwide at any given point and make a lasting difference. A regular gift from your congregation or individuals in your church would help us be there for more people in the long term, wherever the need is greatest. Donate at caweek.org

Other climate justice worship resources are available at caid.org.uk/churches or caid.ie/churches if you’re in Northern Ireland.

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