

Standing Up to Empire Four Sessions by Peter Cruchley & Gethin Rhys

photo credit Scott Gummerson Unsplash.com

In recent years theologians have started to look at how the world views of people who live in, and under, empires have affected how the Bible has been interpreted. The Bible was formed, written, and edited in imperial ages - the mighty empires of Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome were the background to all the stories, teaching, poetry, hopes, and despair of the Biblical writers. When the Psalmist sat down and wept by the Rivers of Babylon the Jewish people were formed anew in the crucible of imperial

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We still live in empires, but our empires now are harder to see - just as, it is believed, goldfish don't perceive the water in which they live. We have world powers who seek to rule as ruthlessly as their imperial forebears, we have economic systems at least as cruel as the ancient institution of slavery and most Daily Devotion readers live in lands which once ruled much of the globe.


The Biblical writers' experience and critique of Empire has much to teach us now. A series of reflections published by the Daily Devotions project in 2019 is offered now as a small group resource. The reflections were written by two URC ministers, the Rev'd Peter Cruchley

Then I saw another angel flying in mid

We have the witness of the Biblical text to remind and inspire us that Empire has fallen. The claims, powers and blandishments of Empire are empty and bring not blessing

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are I

The discovery of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene and Mary reminds us, that from the early Christian beginnings, the Church is a movement of the disinherited. This text places women as the only witnesses to the empty of

	<p>How would you feel if the changes we need to make mean that those of us in the west need to have less in order for a better distribution of resources?</p>
	<p>Thank you, for revealing, through Jesus your son, that we, like him, are your beloved children, with whom you are well pleased, whatever. Give us, as any father might, or any mother too, such an experience of your love that we will at last believe that we are so loved, as we live our lives being part of your awesome creation. Amen.</p>





'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what

was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

the 'heavenly migrant' then escapes because of political violence.



How has migration been used as a weapon in our contemporary politics?

What benefits might migration bring?

Some years ago an asylum charity in Manchester produced a Christmas card with the Holy Family depicted as asylum seekers – how might such an idea change some attitudes?



Rise up Jesus.

Rise up in power to inspire and lead us.

Reveal in our midst the world you are creating.

May your 'last will be first' Spirit

move us to do and believe your word:

" many will come from east and west

and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob

in the kingdom of heaven,

while the heirs of the kingdom

will be thrown into the outer darkness" Amen.

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved.

...

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die.' Then Jonathan answered his father Saul, 'Why should he be put to death? What has he done?' But Saul threw his spear at him to strike him; so Jonathan knew that it was the decision of his father to put David to death. Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food on the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, and because his father had disgraced him.

In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him was a little boy. y. . 4

Jonathan called after the boy, 'Hurry, be quick, do not linger.' So Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master. But the boy knew nothing; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement. Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said to him, 'Go and carry them to the city.' As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept

Jonathan, the crown prince, to love – David, after all

primitive people, savages. They needed some imperial order to get a grip on nature – and to allow the empire to despoil their earth of its natural resources as quickly and as profitably as possible.

Our generation is discovering that Genesis is right. It is creation which is orderly. The result of exploitation of the earth is climate chaos. The result of our determination to kill greenfly on our roses is that pollination of plants and life itself is endangered. Global warming means that the orderly

Look out of the window at whatever part of creation you can see – moon and stars if it is night, mountains or rivers, trees or flowers, animals or birds, if it is day. Remember that God saw that it was all good.

Look at the damage you see to that creation – light pollution, tarmacked roads, manicured gardens. Ask God for forgiveness and invite him to restore the order of his creation.

Session 4 Sing We the Song of High Revolt

When at New College, Oxford, I came to love choral Evensong in the chapel. The excellent choir sang the Song of Mary each evening in a huge variety of settings. As the melodies floated around the beautiful chapel, they spoke of 600 years of choral tradition, the sound of an English empire whose growth, flourishing, and decline had all been planned in this institution more than most.

Very few of the musical settings chosen convey the empire-shaking import of Mary's words. Choral evensong has generally served to bolster the thrones of the powerful, strengthen the imaginations of their hearts and enable them to kick the lowly while they are down. It has been the musical accompaniment to the rape of all parts of the earth once coloured pink on the map – starting with my own country of Wales. Even 'Woodlands', to which many of us in the URC sing the Magnificat, bounces along in a jolly sort of way.

But these words are hardly jolly for most of us. They sound out the doom of all of us privileged by birth, education, or wealth. The hungry will be fed and the lowly will be lifted up.

ourselves. Dare we listen to the true cadences of the Magnificat?

"But when you capture cities in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, kill everyone. Completely destroy all the

recommended it in 1843 had hoped. The people had resisted and the language was refusing to die. So in Canada

Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

St Luke 10.1-5, 17-20

The Book of Revelation is not popular in the URC. We find it sadly lacking in middle class religiosity, with little to offer our aspirational Christianity.

It's our loss, because this book finds in the midst of the horrors of judgement the ultimate hope for the world – "Great Babylon has fallen!" When God announces that all peoples, tribes, languages and nations are to be judged, the angel knows what that means – the empire is over. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.

It was always a mistake to disregard Revelation. In the midst of climate crisis it is fatal. We need to know that God judges the world. He judges those who use up the resources He provided in creation for their own profit. He judges those who even as the earth burns believe that imperial life can carry on regardless. Without that judgement, there is no hope; life on earth will be extinct. But if we open ourselves up to that judgement, it is possible that we might yet be saved.

Contrary to many interpretations of Revelation, we don't have to wait for the end of the world. Jesus saw the signs of judgement and hope all around him. Each time the self-denying disciples of JesuTm0 G978 Tf16erfu 447.t593.4 45

