

Season of Creation 2026

EcoCongregation Scotland

These five full-length scripts by EcoChaplain Rev David Coleman accompany the videos for each week. If used as the basis for worship, they should be freely edited and adapted to your particular situation.

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WEEK 1



image- Public domain print of Jane Austen, photoshopped with original photo taken DJMC at COP 26

“Universally Acknowledged?”

Genesis 1 + Genesis 2 + John 1
(the new RCL readings for 'Creation in Christ')

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It's a truth universally acknowledged....

The opening words of Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' are amongst the most wittily inspired in the English language; written with pointed awareness the of peculiar magic of **starting points**, and of the order we find things in.

For example: The late addition of "Care of Creation" to the Five Marks of Mission' absurdly leads some to presume it must be inferior to other aspects of discipleship.

Today we meet all that head-on

In our more conservative moments, we **might** place faith in phrases like **"back to basics"**, with the bizarre implication that subsequent reflection, adaptation - *and dare I say, evolution* - will be inferior, rather than valid as part of the whole.

But were the creatures who millions of years ago made footprints on Skye inferior to the birds in these cliffs?

Is John inferior to Genesis 1 and 2? And Is Christ as Creator inferior to the Father and Spirit? For centuries, the church says no.

There are many different birds on these cliffs; together they present a lively picture. Many voices, many differing, or even superficially conflicting concerns.

They don't all get on, but somehow they share the same space, lay their eggs, raise their chicks; and these being seabirds, return year after year. For longer than you'd think.... though of course, each year, and each generation, brings different blessings and challenges.

Acknowledged or not, the truth of whom and how God sustains, moves forward through cycles. Generation to generation. Summer and winter. Evening and morning. Acknowledged in Scripture. God never restores. But makes new.

And yet the defining power of inspiring good beginnings can be stolen and twisted by idolatries of power, money, oil, and national pride.

*Usurping that throne of “**truth universally acknowledged**” from which only Truth set free can topple them.*

Just now there’s the terrible truth that “Drill baby drill”, knowingly causes “kill babies, kill”. A truth insufficiently acknowledged, though more than amply supported by science.

*For despite all we’ve seen of droughts, floods, rising seas, melting ice; the groaning of nature well beyond what’s natural, and despite wonderful scriptural endorsements of God’s love for a beautiful, diverse world, we remain vulnerable to the lies of billionaire media, with their intimidating claims to **universal acknowledgement** of promised security, prosperity and employment; all at the cost of **everything** so vital to the writers of these three beginnings.*

In John’s Gospel, the Word expands the acknowledged truth of God’s work of Creation by their total personal immersion in flesh, blood, and Earth. The Word who is God puts himself on the line for all things. Which is why the Word speaks to humanity, the carers for all things.

It’s on the authority of Christ’s own good advice, that instead, we listen for acknowledgement and learn: from God’s signs of heaven and Earth. The trees, the birds, the skies, the seas, the Earth.

As we do so, we discover what faith at its best shares with science: the humility to **acknowledge** that **though** for now, we see “*through a glass, darkly*”; nonetheless, and by the grace of God, we do glimpse something worthy of further investigation.

So, friends, **acknowledge** with goodwill, that when a reader in church feels compelled to conclude a reading with words like “**this is the Word of God**” this is an invitation to a journey, not the end of the road.

The late chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote of how the “**last** word” (las’ot :לַעֲשׂוֹת) of that **first** Creation story indicates the intention of a hands-on God

that Creation's self be "continually creative". Creation's not a one-off, done and dusted.

Continuing creation.

Should that be a truth universally acknowledged?

Readers *of* Jane Austen, through many pages, are entertained as they are forced to re-think - in this case her *dubiously* universal acknowledgment that rich bachelors *must* be actively seeking a wife - because, in the course of her story, we discover both how this may and may not be the case.

But what else, in an age of polycrisis, do we encounter as "truth universally acknowledged....?"

That won't be just printed or digital words themselves, but how and where we read them; the voice *from whom* we hear them, all play a part. Such richness and complexity is not necessarily a bad thing. The decidedly *less* famous *last* word in *Pride and Prejudice* expresses gratitude to those many with a hand in how things turned out.

These three beginnings, in Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and John 1, which communities of scholars and preachers have now given priority, as churches around the world begin to observe this day of "Creation in Christ".... these three tremendous passages *happily* reach *us* through many layers of devotion, interpretation, which we need not wish away. But we need to be aware of these influences.

As well as urgent real-world crises, which might now lead us to interpret more justly and beautifully, than we have done in the past with Genesis 1?

Firstly when *dominion* was so aggressively pursued, throughout the industrial era as *domination*. *Even though* No 'ruler' of the ancient world could expect to stay 'in post' without due care and partnership with 'subjects' whose flourishing was the stern and final criterion of their authority. That was the truth universally acknowledged of their day. The Old Testament supplies hundreds of pages of evidence why 'domination' is everything other than the will of God.

For today, Compare the environmental footprint of a billionaire and an everyday citizen of the global south, and *I pray* you end up **praying** for the poor to **claim** that heritage Christ reveals is theirs whilst there's still a liveable planet to share. With all God's creatures to whom God concurrently and interdependently gave Earth to be a common home.

But then there's still that menially janitorial detachment of 'stewardship'. That theological condom, of inadequate human relationship with Creation, not adopted by any Bible translation, yet seemingly "**universally acknowledged**" to settle the nerves of well-meaning twentieth century Christians, rather than promoting more urgent, active, partnership with, and learning from, fellow creatures. Put more Biblically: when you hear ground is holy, don't buy new boots.

In such one-sidedly human thinking, we're in danger of being content with a dutiful service, merely of God, excluding the co-creation by the Earth, the life-and-light-giving rule of the sun and moon, and the diverse prophetic choruses of the Great Book of Scripture that is this living planet. The Earth we also are. The Way God actually made.

Dig down into what English idioms obscure: that 'adam' is 'Earth' FOR the 'Earth'. We are the beloved "soil for Earth's soil"; Recent studies of beneficial participation of humanity, over millennia, in the rich biodiversity even of the Amazon, give authority to poetic presentation. Likewise, the recognition of how vital and vulnerable is the health, and therefore the care, of the top 20cm of soil for global food production.

We note, too in both Genesis "beginnings" an awareness both of wildlife and creatures, like cattle, which live alongside humans. Domestication is not in question here, though the balance and the health of the whole 'garden' certainly is.

In these "Beginnings", neither wildlife nor farm animals displace each other. It's a point taken up later by prophetic writings longing for a new harmony between wild predators [cf Isaiah 11:6] and domestic prey.

So what IS the Spirit saying to us now?: That wild and Strong Wind from God: as distinct from our rulers, from CEOs?

In recent years, it's been from the Small Island Developing States, hit first and worst by rising seas, that key initiatives have come.

Could this be the work of the Spirit as distinct from colonial or economic convenience? It's certainly distinct from that human supremacism, which like its close racial and social variants, seeks to enslave or eradicate, rather than collaborate and negotiate. ...To trample those **last** whom Christ makes **first**, and in whose voices, above all, God chooses to speak for the good of the Earth.

Most often, when Christians talk of Creation they still feel obliged to confine decisive authority to what they perceive to be "**the** beginning". Sometimes there's "the bit at the end" of Scripture too, as if the thousand intervening pages Scripture were a desert drenched in napalm, rather than a rainforest of interwoven wisdom for survival. A forest of nature-literate prophets who warned how justice and peace make for the integrity of creation; how moral and environmental pollution are one and the same. And Jesus himself, so frequently close to nature in life and teachings.

It should not be possible to read these three stories of the inclusive majesty of God as Creator without also being struck by the prominence given to diversity and collaboration; by the inclusion, in advance of the races, nations and cultures of humanity, of "all things" made, as John insists, through Christ.

That 'Biodiversity is the wisdom of God' (motto of the RZSS) should be inescapable from the meticulously inclusive choruses of Genesis 1, where the word "**every**" occurs a startling **23** times.

And alongside that affirmation of diversity and inclusivity in Creation, Genesis 1 dramatically expresses how God involves and devolves the 'creating' to Creation whilst remaining the creator of life. That the co-creative sea or land "brings forth" life is the same, in the next breath as how "God made".

Thus these readings are a good opportunity to deal with any deeply damaging fears that our love, awe and attention to Creation might in any sense detract from worship of God. Your heart shouldn't need me to point out the opposite is true. Awe at a mountain, delight in a puffin, as well as wonder, and spiritual 'fear' at the fiercer and more terrifying aspects of how the world is made; these are rich dimensions of our worship of God, who cannot be

loved without our love for our neighbour. Whose creative intention is that all God makes be 'very good'. And who blesses all Creation with the pinnacle of God's work, the Sabbath, which allows for the recuperative cycles of what we must not treat as a single-use planet.

Yet harm can yet be done. Eternal laws can be broken. The seasons, migrations, and life-giving cycles are sustained, only as Earth is cared for. And in the name of God, of Christ and the Wild Wind, from our beginnings unto the end of the age, may it be a truth universally acknowledged, that this is what we're here for! AMEN.

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WEEK 2

“Only Natural Ingredients!”

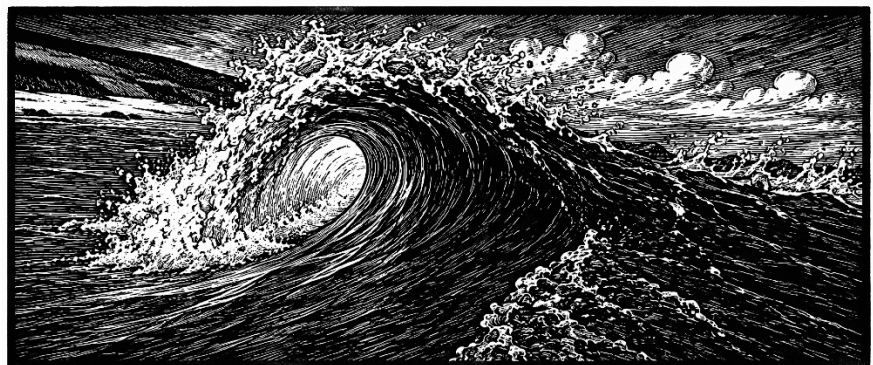


Image: original DJMC photo from the sea at Lona, digitally filtered.

Exodus 14 + Exodus 15

One of my most popular clips this year....was when abruptly and belatedly, I took my leave of fossil fuel transport.

On the way back from a church visit, my old diesel ground to a halt in four lanes of traffic. And no amount of honking from surrounding traffic would shift it.

A reminder and a rebuke, I think, of how the illusion of power we're fed behind that fossil fuel-powered wheel can betray us. About how long we imagine we can postpone the most urgent change. Both at a personal and national level.

And I heard it "on the grapevine" from the lifeboat crew: On the causeway to Lindisfarne, it's not pilgrims on foot who get cut off.... but rather those suffering the "Egypt syndrome" of trust in their "chariots". Active travel, on foot, on a bike, is cautious, careful travel, treading lightly with respect for the direct connection with the holy Ground of God's Earth.

When Moses discovers he's on holy Ground, with a vision of a fellow creature on the brink of annihilation, the response prescribed is not protective clothing. But connective roaming. Off with the shoes. The excruciating urgency of the bush blazing becomes the urgency to overturn slavery. To save what might yet be saved. To the glory of God

Blessed are you, Lord God of all Creation....

Scholars point out that praise of the "God of all Creation" - invoked so widely whenever Christians share bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ - that this arises, historically and naturally in the same breath as love of the God of justice; seen in this nautical climax of the Exodus.

The dividing of the waters, like a recycled Creation Story, enhanced by emphasis on liberation; God as a warrior, yes, against the futility of human warfare.

Even and perhaps especially when it's masked by that long-discredited fig-leaf of 'just war'. The first casualty is always Creation. Why the surprise when they fight back?

The Red Sea story is thrilling, and terrifying, with God leading the charge of the elements, who willingly fight, with the God of Justice, against war and oppression.

I'm glad that attempts to domesticate this story into a leisurely stroll across a 'sea of reeds' fell out of favour: as also those half-baked attempts to blame a coincidental high or low tide in an area with negligible rise and fall.

The powerfully subversive triumph of the formerly enslaved, in alliance with the waters, over the war machine of a technological superpower, needs to be received, to be pondered, without being explained away.

The triumph dance of Miriam and her liberated women; their fierce song of God the warrior, needs to be discerningly cherished in context like the rejoicing of Mary that the birth of her child leads to the pulling down of the mighty from their thrones. It's the song of slaves liberated, and absolutely not of armies of conquest.

Might we also receive this story with the immersively integrated attitude to miracles found in the Celtic Saints?

Like seafaring Saint Columba of Iona, frequenter of these particular waters, patron of 60 or 70 Scottish churches of many denominations, and only pipped at the post for Patron of Scotland when the relics of St Andrew arrived centuries later.

Columba who lived among the communion of Creation, as also of the Saints. Who knew the reality of heaven and Earth interwoven. For whom politics was an expression of faith, as was his hospitality for guests in need, of whatever species.

For such Christians, God's action, in nature, for justice is not alien to what God has made: Miracle, as a sign of God, is both miraculous and natural. As therefore is justice. Only natural ingredients. That's the way it should be.

So much of the Red Sea story slots into real-life experience.

Walking across these tidal stretches, you glimpse that wall of water, boiling in the indeterminate distance and realise how vulnerable you would be, if you did not keep on walking. One foot in front of the other, guided by landmarks, or the poles at Lindisfarne. Way out there, where the water runs faster than you can.

There's that unmistakeable feeling, far out on the way through the waters to these holy places, that we do exist at the mercy of the Earth on whom humanity chooses to wage war. War in which so many species and so many

human communities become expendable collateral damage. As if the tide that went out will never turn.

Out there, you grasp both the blessing of respectful friendship with the Earth, but also the causal link of injustice with Creation's rage as seas rise, to cut off such places for ever. That's the point to sit up and take notice. As the builders of houses on rock and sand both did and didn't, in a climate that neither could control.

Today, we see Creation not just groaning, but desperately fighting back, with the difference in Exodus, from contemporary experience, that it's the worst are hit first. So protesters of all generations cry out at the continuing vacuum. This is their prayer: "What do we want?- Climate justice! when do we want it - NOW!"

They find strength in this: that the whole narrative through the Plagues to the Red Sea Exodus brutally affirms the unity of human injustice and environmental injury.

I hope I've fulfilled a promise I made to the lady from the Pakistani churches to tell you that the floods her homeland had suffered were "not natural" - not without knowing human cause nor clear responsibility.

This year 141 nations at the UN this year agree... with the resolution brought by the tiny Pacific nation of Vanuatu.

Superpower bedfellows Russia and the United States joined hands in opposition. Whilst the US and Iran have in common the refusal even to contemplate a net zero target.

In all this, the remedy and intervention God chooses involves seemingly powerless and insignificant people who hear God's word, who act and play their part.

By the choice and grace of God, Moses' tiny outstretched hand is as vital to the event as the waters who overwhelm the Egyptians. The small things make the difference, by the grace of this 'God of all Creation'. So that Creation, working with God, may be seen to hold injustice to account. Why should we expect it to be otherwise?

It takes a while for us, here in the global north; where so many insults and put-downs involve comparing human beings to fellow creatures, to grasp the dignified solidarity between poor, downtrodden or despised people, and the more than human neighbours and relatives with whom we share a habitat -a common home.

'The world belongs to God, the Earth and all who live there'.

Though in conversations about upgrading parts of the Season of Creation to a defining festival of world Christianity, I was troubled to hear Christians continue to confuse each other with talk of the Earth as a 'gift'.

As if this complex theatre of God's hospitality were abandoned exclusively to our whims alone. To this species whom God placed in the Garden to serve and protect; fruitfully to participate rather than to exploit, and then discard.

Our gratitude that we share this home, is quite sufficient, without over-egging that pudding to possession. That we live here, alongside fellow creatures, is gift enough. Indeed, are we not God's gift to the Earth, for their benefit?

This God-gifted species, through whom, so tragically, when we over-reach ourselves for power rather than care, the Earth is cursed.

Pope Leo has re-emphasised that caring for creation is "an expression of humanity as well as solidarity." This is who we're meant to be.

Aid agencies took a while, but most have now got there: that you cannot care for marginalised humanity without care for their environment; even though, conservation may tragically be pursued at the cost of those already most vulnerable. Evicting, rather than involving local human communities who might have generations of experience of living alongside wildlife. Transition is a must, but transition must be just. The best rewilding is also re-peopling; and Pope Francis' letter from 2015 already made this abundantly clear.

As also that **war and fossil fuel dependence form a single vicious cycle.** "Structures of sin" that devastate lives and livelihoods.

It's an ever-more conspicuous criterion of valid prophecy, to demonstrate how violent injustice inevitably provokes an angry response from Nature.

How receptive are we to such prophecy? Though with nature's indiscriminate rage, where the poor are hit first and worst, the powerful, like the Egyptians, need not think they can bail out and escape.. Friends, great or small, we share a fragile planet, enslaved by greed.

Like it or not this is a spiritual and philosophical challenge, on which both formal and merely cultural interpretations of Christian Scripture have a bearing. So it's not enough to say "Lord, Lord" like those of whom Jesus said "I never knew you".

The devilish absurdity of political parties has now arisen, who claim "Christian values" whilst abusively rejecting Christ in the stranger, neglecting hospitality to the vulnerable, vilifying diversity, striving to make the rich richer, the poor poorer and promoting the expansion of fossil fuels, which they know full well, directly kills, evicts and enslaves those neighbours, human and otherwise, whom Christ commands we love as we love ourselves.

Those without love for whom we simply cannot claim to love God.

Devilish, because that name for God's opposition means the disconnecter; the unraveller of the connections of our very survival. In enslaved alliance even with that angry nature, because of whom, as the Egyptians are recorded as realising, all too late, that it was time to "flee from the Israelites, for God is fighting for them against us"

In his preaching last Season of Creation, Archbishop Nolan observed that as regards consciousness and commitment to committed climate action, in churches as in society, and compared with the high water of encouragement around COP26, the tide has gone out.

How should we respond?

Not necessarily to abandon your direction of travel to net zero or to trespass that dry land with impunity. Instead, read the signs. Of such things I was reminded at the Council for World Mission Assembly in American Samoa, where locals told of the prelude to the Tsunami, when first of all, the animals

and birds vanished inland, then the sea rapidly receded, before returning with devastating force, as I saw, three years later.

Tsunami readiness is taught in their schools, in these terms: if the sea recedes, head for the hills. Read the signs, as Jesus said. Let the creatures be our teachers.

We ourselves are Creation; and that connection is integral to what it means to be human at all... not that this is something of the distant past, because sisters and brothers in Christ today, particularly those from indigenous communities, find meaning in their Christian faith as creatures amongst creatures, albeit, with a special commission to serve and protect; to participate, and yes, sometimes decisively to intervene, with beneficial outcome for life as a whole in the life of the world, to the glory of God. AMEN

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WEEK 3

“Artificial Integrity?”

Exodus 16



Slave shackles (from an original photo, Smithsonian Museum, used under 'fair use' conditions.)

What keeps you on your toes? What helps you in your journeying? And what sets you truly free?

Exodus is one of many stories of how deep and damaging and complex are the wounds on Creation as a whole, of exploitative exclusive and entitled intervention; of the denial of God-given relatedness, mutual dependence, and the responsibility that belongs thereto.

Wounds, not just from violence, but even from careful surgery, and even when the knife is withdrawn, require care, convalescence. Yes, time, yes, cost. Yes, care, for the whole person. And a certain amount of discipline. The doctor needs the courage to disagree with what may harm the patient.

It is as a doctor that Jesus styled himself when he was criticised for associating with those who transgressed the integrity of religious law and social custom.

But what else is faith for?

And healing's progress from the things that harm the Earth - what faith calls sin - requires of those who harm, that they go and sin no more.

Most mainstream churches in Scotland have made at least an initial, sometimes stumbling attempt in the direction of Net Zero. That long and often perplexing pathway to doing less harm in the daily conduct of our life and work. Abstaining from the imagined fleshpots of the dying age of fossil fuels. Looking to play our part in a just transition. An Exodus from that violent age. Thank God for such prayerful initiatives.

Coincidentally, most mainstream churches in Scotland are also at some stage of formal apology for their historic involvement in the enslavement of fellow human beings.

Not everyone agrees, and some have furiously dug in, with arguments strikingly similar in their narrowness, both to those which delayed the formal abolition of slavery and which are appreciably slowing our transition, with justice, to a way of life more sustainable for life on Earth.

Those opposed, appealing often to 'common sense', are sometimes surprised at the level of profound support for such sincere and humble gestures as expressions of faith. Today we're reminded, though, how the Book of Exodus in many, and sometimes alarmingly challenging and complex

ways, shows how, the essence and origins of the human relationship with God - as Christianity has come to know God - is about liberation from slavery and about justice as the acknowledgement of need.

Dealing honestly and openly with such difficult things goes to the heart of our faith, every bit as much as our relationship with God as Creator, both in the beginning and ongoingly as sustainer..

God, not some sci-fi alien, but intimately involved to deal with the realities, the personalities, of sky and soil. God whose wisdom is diversity.

God who does rather more than leave the gate open so that slaves may wander out at their peril.

In Scotland, we heard last year of the tragic guerrilla rewilding of lynx in the Cairngorms: creatures who, with a lifetime of captivity, were totally unprepared for the demands of life in the wild.

Such a contrast with the meticulous programmes to reintroduce wildcats; working with local communities, and ensuring that the once lost generational skills of the cats were in place before that. And the beavers, but only with equal care, who are not just tipped out on a landscape. Released with collaborative care and support, to begin their work to minimise flooding and maximise riverside biodiversity.

The curriculum of Exodus, like our churches' revisiting of the taboo facts of their historic and continuing benefit both from the slave trade and from fossil fuel, is that tough-love blessing of reacquainting the damaged people with who they are and have been. In order to point them along the way to who we can be.

Giving them back what the grandparents of every healthy human society take care to pass on.

One of the greatest blessings of the intergenerational mixing which I've seen happening probably as much in churches as anywhere else, is the possibility that the dreams of the old and the visions of the young may encounter and enrich each other.

That Pentecostal wonder, which gave birth to the church, already repurposing the Scriptures of Israel. But when generations are torn apart, deprived of such meetings, what then?

It's been observed that online media, especially via Artificial Intelligence, is filling that gap. And not just with the young. And that, every bit as much as the colossal environmental impact questions about heat, power and water for data centres, should be cause for wariness; for an insistence on total transparency.

Don't ask your granny, or even your friend, with whom you can disagree. Ask AI, which you might not dare to stand up to. Not feeling competent to assert your humanity.

Human beings are not at all the only creatures for whom intergenerational sharing is a vital dimension of survival, though this is at its most striking in human communities whose cultures have seen themselves as most closely related to the Earth and fellow creatures.

There's an even more sinister aspect to technological enslavement: the unlearning of the horror at war.

Thirty years ago, when I began my ministry, I could still converse face to face with veterans of both world wars, as well as read around what they had to say. Now, as Pope Leo also observes: We are also witnessing a disconcerting loss of historical memory, as first-hand accounts of the Holocaust and the two World Wars are disappearing. This leads to a selective or distorted rewriting of the past.

That's why a number of Christian leaders are cautiously and responsibly using their positions. Not as luddites, but as custodians of memory, which can be deceptively supplanted by the shallow fruit of calculations and processing. It's also a lethal assumption to presume that such processes make the results neutral.

Instead, and unsurprisingly, they reflect the prejudices of those who build, and even more those who bankroll and control them, ruling out what does not fit their limited precedents. Preventing us, as I've discovered in online Bible study, even from searching for what the algorithms exclude.

To destroy a people, amputate their history. To totally enslave them, misrepresent it. To set them free, revisit it openly, with hindsight. For truth and reconciliation.

In Exodus, Moses and Aaron have their hands full as intermediaries between a rather too scarily mighty God and a people so damaged that they can be poisoned by nostalgia for the food they were given only because starving slaves can't work.

The God of our ancestors? Who were they, and what have they to do with us?
It looks hopeless.

But for all this, and for all the supporting fireworks of the Glory of God, nonetheless, God listens, God responds.

In Exodus we see God in most urgent solidarity with creatures who have been enslaved. Spiritually hamstrung, shackled. Leading them out.

This is the heritage out of which, Jesus chooses to say: I am the Way. It's in journeying that we discover both faithfulness and freedom.

Freedom to respond, to adapt, to survive in dignity, on our journey to the benefit of, rather than at the cost of the life with whom we share a common home. And with whom the downtrodden and exploited share a common fate.

Maybe that's why, over many years now, it's been clear that a faith commitment to care for the Earth; to recognise humanity as a party amongst parties to the rainbow covenant between God and all life, cannot be hygienically contained as an optional, expendable "issue" or marginalised, as decorative icing on the cake of a faith built on the choice of God to become flesh. In Christ, God's hands are placed in the shackles. Pierced by the nails of every Empire which divides to rule.

Care for the Earth will mean love for our neighbour, and a not merely dutiful but loving commitment to journeying to the sort of freedoms -and disciplines- which bring joy, hope and health to the life of the Earth. And human beings,

as this Season we heard, we who are 'Earth for the Earth' should delight in that calling.

Pope Leo's encyclical letter "Magnifica humanitas", is addressed like Pope Francis' Laudato Si to "all Christians and to all men and women of goodwill".

If there's a difference in tone, it's in how Pope Leo takes such a very high and urgent view, specifically of human journeying for justice in company with Creation: all the higher, because of the insight that true humanity cannot come to a fullest expression for the common good without the sort of freedom exemplified in steps to define and defend both human rights, -including racial and gender justice - and the rights and the journeying of Creation beyond the human.

As in Exodus, slavery, so appropriately symbolised by shackles and chains is the physical, mental and cultural denial of journeying, responsiveness, connection, and responsibility. The stunting of personal and spiritual growth, for a whole population.

But as a first step, "listening to the victims of spiritual, economic, institutional, sexual and power-based abuse, as well as abuses of conscience, is an integral part of a journey toward justice, which includes acknowledging the harm done, just reparation and taking steps to prevent it from happening again."

In Exodus, God listens and responds. Not with brutally lavish gifts like those that spoil our children, and deprive them of initiative and the journey of learning; not with prefabricated digital answers which intimidate, intoxicate and undermine every possibility of our own creativity and inspiration. God listens, then responds with a very basic life support which provokes the active question "What's this".

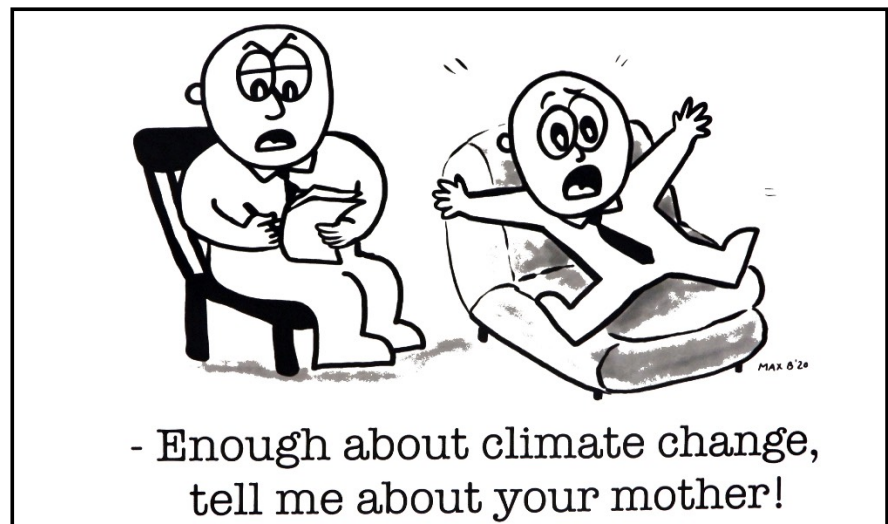
The provision of Manna, according to Moses, is God's testing of the people, in the sense of a qualifying course to maturity, rather than to see if they're worth bothering with. Jesus' own time in the wilderness, which was marked by hardship and temptations as well as the fellowship of wildlife and of angels, has that aspect.

An insistence on holding together the worship of God in the face of the powers that would disconnect the fullness of his and our humanity from justice and integrity. And the path to maturity and freedom, in service of our common home. AMEN

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WEEK 4

Image: cartoon displayed in the Blue Zone at COP26, Glasgow



“Save the Planet - BUT!”

Exodus 16

Ezekiel is the most foul-mouthed and extreme of all the major prophets: but the sharp taste of his sour grapes is amongst the most easily quotable of his many urgent and concrete calls for change of heart and mind in response to very real dangers. What does it take for us to hear his message of “Turn, then, and live!”

But it might be shocking to let it sink in, if ever we do, how much damage is already done.

I've said so often that I hold on myself because of my faith. Because Christ says so helpfully and honestly, not to be overcome by worry about tomorrow because we're up to our eyes in today.

Although it really is a mixed bag we're up to our eyes in. So much of the energy generated in Scotland is already renewable. Batteries which would have been science fiction when your movement began are being widely installed and making transition work.

Every simplistic and bloody-minded myth of why transition simply couldn't happen is exposed as shallow and ill-informed.

Meanwhile, we're nonetheless looking, as a minimum, at several generations' worth of rapid change in the seasons Scotland's farmers and tourist industries rely on, as well as far more frequent extremes of wind, and wetter, warmer winters.

Let's not go into the worries about the Gulf Stream just for now.

But the last thing any community liberated by love can honestly say right now, is that "everything is going to be all right". Ezekiel, of course heard from God that to be silent is to be complicit. Bear that in mind, as we also hear it.

Who's to blame? Who's stuffed themselves with the sour grapes of oil and AI?

Well, it gets harder and harder to say it wasnae' me.

Not having caused every single part of a crisis is such a stupid reason for standing back and grumbling when it's 'all hands to the pumps'. And next time someone comes out with "China pollutes, so why should I bother?" I might ask, since Jack the Ripper and Harold Shipman notched up a fair old body-count, whether it's OK if I murder just one or two?

What sort of "authority" are folk looking to, to carry on this way? It's pretty fragile.

Especially now that the science of attribution is so far advanced? Who can deny our own place in an interactive Creation: as if the choice of more oil in one place did not cause death, displacement and suffering in another.

Forgive them, they know not what they do? Aye, right! We do know. Even if we lie about it.

But we really can learn from what moved things on in the past - like the confronting of those who liked to see themselves as respectable citizens with the misery caused by slavery -even and because the economy was based on it.

"Yes I love nature, but "; "Yes of course we should save the planet, "but"... rings pretty hollow as we board that plane to fly when an electric or hydrogen train could get us there.

Did you know -well now you do- that the climate impact of pollution from air travel is definitely multiplied- maybe two or three times - at altitude?

And if it's a matter of time, well how much time do you think we have ?

And yet Christianity, built round Christ first crucified then risen, is about realistic hope beyond too late, rather than crossing our fingers, closing our eyes and hoping - not that such is worthy of the sacred name of hope - for the best.

People -of all ages- in our Scottish coastal communities will be keeping a wary eye on storm surges on top of around 90cm of sea-level rise by the time those born today might hope to be drawing their pension. [Scottish Government figures <https://marine.gov.scot/sma/assessment/coastal-erosion-and-flood-risk-management>]

Whoever is or isn't enjoying those grapes, the "sour taste' is, for the immediately foreseeable future, locked in, ours are those teeth painfully on edge, which is why Ezekiel's concept of judgement and mercy by cause and effect, still has much to teach us, even within one lifetime.

To build with resilience rather than fall apart with denial.

Particularly as the youth of today become the grandparents of tomorrow. Slipping into that role of the ones called to pass on identity and wisdom. To make decisions for their posterity.

Is all we have taught them the ability to whinge? Is that my only heritage as my children take control. I pray not.

Every generation has the choice of committed hope, or despair, irrespective of what they inherit. Yes, your parents and grandparents may well have messed up. But what sort of ancestor do you want to be yourself?

"You'll die of old age, but we'll die of climate change" - is one of the grimmer and more popular banner slogans you'll see in protests by youth movements such as Fridays for Future.

"That's not fair!"

It's true that there are vulnerabilities for every generation, as well as responsibilities: even the responsibility of the babies to survive, to become the next generation of nurturers.

But at different stages of life, things change. You see that in so many other species too: that's how we survive beyond infancy. It's vital for life that babies cry. As well as that parents and carers are cared for sufficiently by their community to be able to respond.

We have roles to fulfil, and yes, authority- like a mantle, like a uniform, is something we borrow in order better to be able to serve.

. The baby seals you'll see on our coastlines in a month or two grow fat fast on incredibly rich milk for three weeks or so, before their mothers, who've lost getting half their body weight providing that, abruptly clear off so the pups have to learn to swim and hunt alone.

The baby swallows who gape and squeal as their parents are run ragged catching insects on the wing. You'll have seen the teenage seagulls, already able to fly and feed themselves, who nonetheless hunch up and cry piteously

when an adult comes close. The roles and expectations of generations are a wonder of Creation, and a reminder of what we're part of.

Both Ezekiel's thoughts on the sour grapes proverb, and Jesus' clash with the nervous hypocrites of his own community raise questions about how generations work together for the common good.

So that in amongst the 'unfairness' a given generation might either feel or own up to, we need to hear God's all-embracing concern:

"Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine."

Whilst the radical recognition that a particular sort of life matters is what helps us to care for all life, rather than "unfairly" diverting resources from the more entitled.

We've had a strangely dangerous sign of hope this year. That climate scientists have abandoned a theoretical model of total global disaster, leaving only the likelihood of catastrophe.

The truly good news is that all the effort, investment and expense, with whatever motives, from whatever nations, towards sustainable energy has made a measurable difference.

And yet with the abandonment of a scenario of climate science which built on something very different from the complex and startlingly explosive global growth of sustainable energy we're seeing right now, Deniers, liars and Fascists, sponsored by oil interests have seized on what they despicably hope is an opportunity to rubbish both the facts and the hopeful responses to climate crisis. To mount a frontal assault on the vital resources of real future hope for the health of the planet and for justice in human societies

It's a tragic reflection on the influences on popular media that news about the retired disaster model was not balanced by the far more sobering, but therefore also liberating tidings that the remaining lower-end scenario, keeping the rise in global temperature below what we're doing to realise will be a terrifying 2 degrees, is also, for now, off the table.

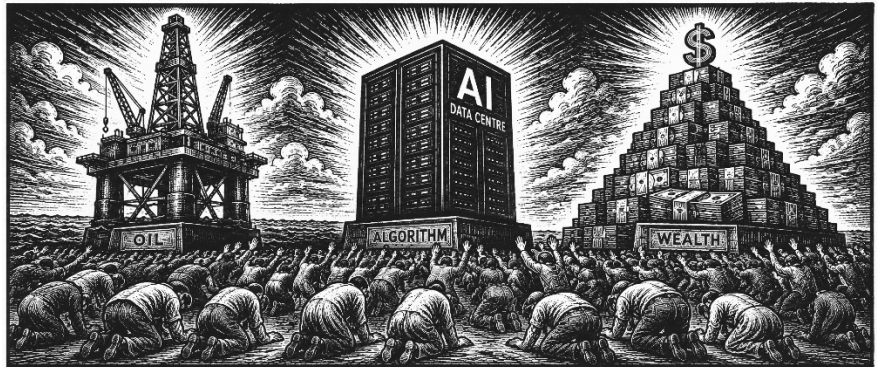
Yes, it's all about the sort of truth and hope that gets us moving..... And that's more nuanced than any simple guilt trip or blame game.

It's no trivial proverb that it takes a village to raise a child. As it takes all available generations, or at least contact with them, to make a healthy church. The weakness of the proverb is that it says nothing about how it takes children to sustain the village. Young people are not an asset: they're either fully part of things or not, and like other generations too, will both give and receive guidance. The rebellions of toddlers are fairly early contained. But its at the borderlands of our generations that sparks can fly and knees can jerk. And those burdened with responsibility can drill, or dig in.

So Yes. it's all about hope.....

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WEEK 5



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“Artificial Idolatry?”

Exodus 20: Ten Commandments

What more can be said of the Ten Commandments, adorning church walls throughout the country; notorious for “thou shalt not’s” yet the subject of

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rapturous devotion in Scripture itself. The communities that have inhabited and decorated church buildings work with many complementary aims, which may include both the care for the congregation and their awareness of the majesty of God.

Nothing we choose is neutral 'business'. It's as firm a "new commandment" as any from the lips of Christ to seek first the Kingdom of God and their justice. Where concern for historic detail has not over-ruled it, the adjustments to stairs doors and toilets for inclusive access, acknowledge that commandment, as well as the installation of solar panels, and even turbines, which defend the viability of a church in what may be perceived as a remote location. Care for the immediate grounds of the a building, their impact on wildlife, and perhaps on venerable trees, comes into that category too.

These openings of doors to Christ in the stranger are themselves both an outreach and an obedience to the laws of love: to the New -or perhaps renewed 'commandment' of Christ, that we aspire to love one another as Christ loves us.

Commandment? Hmm!

It's striking that, despite contraventions aplenty of codified moral law in the Old Testament, you'd struggle in vain to find specific resentment of this 'code' within Scripture.

Why?- perhaps because of the context given here, of guidance to safeguard the wellbeing and integrity of God's Free People, saved from slavery.

The laws may often be broken, but seldom are they seen as pointless.

Because human dignity belongs with faithfulness in economic and intimate relationships. With integrity in the judiciary, and in the conduct of trials. Over generations, care for the elderly benefits us all.

But the code is still demanding in other ways. And that in itself can be scary. At this first gift of the law in Exodus 20, the people stand well off. They tremble with the wrong sort of fear. They talk, grudgingly, to Moses, their human intermediary, but fear that God is altogether too dangerous to come close to.

Is it, that they- or we - realise, and perhaps even fear, that unlike our idols, God cannot be deceived or manipulated? And that, beyond thunder, lightning and climate crisis, the possibility that God will see through even the things about which we deceive ourselves - that is the most frightening of all?

In this gift of commandments, following the association of God with liberative justice, comes that warning about idolatry, perhaps the source of much remnant nervousness about affection and awe for the wonders of Creation, which I've witnessed in international church conversations about Creation.

In the Assisi conference of 2024, a prominent church leader graciously reassured the ecumenical gathering that "When we admire the greatness of a mountain, the admiration is passed on to God". The danger is surely far greater that we disconnect from our listening and our relatedness to fellow creatures.

Indeed, idolatry in an ecumenical, multicultural setting, is far less, simply "someone else's view of God" than the loyalty, and worship we express in our most crucial decisions, to money, power, national pride, and, on a global level, "oil", in ways which are proper only for the divine. As Pope Leo put it this year : "Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war! True strength is shown in serving life..."

Perhaps inevitably, since it's 'Yahweh' [the LORD] speaking, the gift of Law in Exodus is accompanied by the supporting chorus of Creation's terrifying voices: "thunder, lightning, trumpet, and cloudy mountain". And yet whilst Moses, (like the Mouse with the Gruffalo behind him?) unconvincingly insists terror is not the way to receive God's guidance, it is amidst the most extreme and awe inspiring conditions in the theatre of nature, which in previous chapters has almost killed them with thirst and hunger, that God offers the gift of the Ten Commandments.

This gift is not, it turns out, an immediate success. Even though it might speak to experience, in Egypt, of how the names of many gods made into idols were taken in vain as a pretext for abuse. Even given the more immediate memory of the traumatic journey following the escape from the superpower army of Egypt.

“Let sleeping gods lie”, would be an attractive saying, for a people who will have learned from bitter experience that AI - artificial idolatry(?) is about control, rather than the freedom which this God’s Law is meant to enable.

But it’s amidst terrifying spectacle they’re told that this God has caught up with them to “test” them.

Is it then a surprise if it sounds more stick than carrot. Can you blame them? Fear - and worry - certainly can paralyse us.

Yet awe can do us good, to the extent that I see so often how our respectful encounter with nature, with mountains and with the seas brings a refreshment for which science has added its seal of approval. At the hustings this year, responsible political parties were content to be quoted as agreeing that investment in nature is investment in public health. Sounds popular! But it’s complicated. Handle with care. Always handle with care.

I’ve heard cries of wonder at firework displays, those I’ve seen the waves of irrepressible delight in a crowd, when thunderous killing machines smear their poisonous coloured smoke across the sky. For centuries, the public relations arms of armed forces the world over have offered the free lunch of spectacle. They wouldn’t do it if they didn’t think it was worth their while.

The wisest of statesmen and the wildest of dictators both will grasp that extraordinary experiences do shape lives, both for individuals and for nations. And some are additive. Some, like the bait on a hook. Some are gifts for responsible use. Like the discipline of law itself.

You’ve told me how more of you listen, and listened better, because to make these reflections I get off my backside and struggle into places which speak for themselves of the majesty and beauty of God, of Christ, of the Wild Wind who make and remake new every morning. There’s awe too in identifying wildlife for the first time, or finding oneself respectfully closer than ever before, even to the everyday creatures who have made their home in our cities.

I hope that what these places and creatures have to say for themselves will strengthen first the message of urgent care and change out of love for God and fellow creatures, especially the human ones.

And then the equally urgent reassurances that care for nature is totally necessary to care for the human species whom God, in Genesis, placed here for that purpose.

If I'm out and about, I do keep an eye on the sun in the sky, to make sure I get down in time for the last bus. Whilst being open to those "wow" moments, on the ridges and summits, of an experience or an opportunity neither paid for nor deserved, nonetheless, I do my homework before what looks like a test.

Yet, I wonder, do I say, often enough, how this commands the discipline of my looking before I leap.

Not stretching a point so far it'll snap, and lose me an audience. But also not attempting a final summit if it looks as if I'll fall off. Not going swimming in wild water unless I'm sure I can get out. Accidents do happen, but stupidity is chosen.

So even in making these films, there's fear there, of a sort, but it's fear which helps me hold on to the journey and the business of being alive, which is demanding enough as years pass and both illness and minor mishaps take their toll.

That's how the commandments are presented. Not merely to live well today, but as a guide to responsible living over many generations. As we ourselves move from youth through middle age to the blessing of the generations who should be there to impart wisdom. Honouring God with the dignity and discipline of free people, who value relationships and even, in its proper context, property, where that impacts on human dignity.

Dignity. Hmm.

Yet we cannot overlook that for those who wrote this down, with a heritage of liberation from slavery, their own enslavement of others (verse 17) was a continuing commonplace. That's a stern reminder, prayerfully to discern guidance for today, rather than receive 'commandments' narrowly at face value.

Thank God - and not just in a throwaway "thank God" sort of way - that most mainstream churches (RC, URC, SEC, CofS, Methodists,) have made

dignified apologies for historic involvement in the African slave trade. It helps with where we're going to recognise where we've come from. To repeat as little as possible the deadly idiocies of history. To learn from the experience of those who've shaped and trod the paths before you. Again: not to be them. But to be, with integrity, the people the world needs now. That's in your interest too, and that of future generations.

We need encouragement. Yet we can be disablingly over-awed. The fear of the wandering Hebrews -which is "not the fear God's looking for" becomes a barrier to change, to action, to the choices which make for a good life, through habitual hard-wiring of compassion and justice into our daily decisions.

The short and basic code of the law has value because it builds resilient identity. Even on a small scale, like membership in our movement. Churches find they have permission to say "because we are an EcoCongregation, therefore we won't invest in fossil fuels, we will use fairtrade goods, we won't use single-use plastic, we will attend to waste", or whatever expression folk choose in their very varying local contexts.

The Commandments are presented as for the good of the people. Who act hesitant, wavering. Vulnerable,

Perhaps this is still part of the damage done by slavery; that irrespective of the value of the guidance offered, the people stand back in fear of what looks like costly change.

In our day, this might also come out as contempt, for the science which might help us to "live long in the land" or indeed, to live long and well in the Earth we share with all the life God cares for in the Rainbow Covenant.

The anger and triumphal trolling that wells up with every perceived weakness, uncertainty or inaccuracy of evidence for the urgency of just transition; is this also a symptom of the fear that the scientists might be right, and that stories shared from our sisters and brothers hit first and worst by the impact of climate crisis really are something to take notice of? Do we simply resent and deny the urgent facts of climate crisis? Or can we be

guided, tested - and then qualified by God for a better life as we take such things to heart?

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