

A WORD



ON THE WILD SIDE



**Reflections on Lent readings
as spiritual preparation
for the United Nations
Climate Conference**

A word about 'A Word'

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These texts arose from an invitation to provide a series of short reflections in Lent, for Glasgow's online Christian Radio Station, Radio Alba, as part of a spiritual preparation for the Conference of the Parties (COP) United Nations Climate Conference due to take place in Glasgow in November 2021

Given their short form, you're reminded that these pieces are to provoke reflection. You might look in vain for specific recommendations on insulation and church heating, but you're clever enough to find those elsewhere.

It's OK to disagree, but better still if you examine why you do.

We've added some hymn texts, which are free to use and share.

Above all, enjoy!

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Song: The Generosity of Trees (melody :Glasgow)

(Written for the Glasgow Churches Together event on Clean Air)

1)The generosity of trees!
each leaf our life sustains
for Love is Green
and Christ's embrace
through wood and nails retains.

2)The shaping of a space to live
where freedom is inspired
requires attentiveness to thrive
that freedom be desired.

3)One Tree of Life lines every road:
the sign of God's wide arms:
God's people, breathing in such love
exhale inclusive psalms.

4)A city purged of foliage
where choking juggernauts
reign sovereign, wealth-inviolable
though rich, must be rethought:

5)So plant, love, tend: forge paths to care
for needs, and to embrace
all creatures breathing, that their praise
may beautify this place



(The most polluted air in Scotland)

LENT 1:



Lent 1: The crowded desert

In November, the great circus of the United Nations Climate Conference comes to town in this city of Glasgow, when the response of Christians may need to be both something old and something quite new.

Old, in the sense of living out the deepest and most positive traditions of our faith; new, in that these will need to be creatively recycled, repurposed; ***the pearls of great price in the field*** still have to be dug up, to realise their value.

And maybe for some of us, the field has still to be purchased, until we find the reckless joy, to blow the stranded assets of our investment in an already obsolete status quo and go for it. Get on with it. Take the advice of those other angels, at the Ascension, to stop gawping up at the sky, and find our place and purpose as God's people here and now.

The climate emergency, which ***is going to be*** the backdrop on which the drama of ***all*** our lives is played out, overturns the sad security of churches who until now could see no future other than decline and irrelevance.

It releases us from rational despair, and insists that, like Christ in the wilderness, we both throw ourselves on the mercy of God ***and*** keep our wits about us.

COVID has already taken away what we thought was normality. It will leave us the legacy of realisation that faith is the gift God gives us with which to encounter with hope, such manifest uncertainty as we now do face.

That faith is our best resource to encounter an age when **normal** has no meaning.

To take care of Christ in the Stranger's guise, and to entertain angels unawares should come naturally to those who profess the faith of Christ

Glasgow has hosted great events before, such as the Commonwealth Games, and although the mantra of the environmental movement is that we should first re-use, then recycle, repurpose, it will need to be more than just more of the same.

As people of faith, this juggernaut of diplomacy, this alarmingly disruptive intrusion into the life of the city gives us the chance to enjoy a much more significant legacy in the ways we live ... AND pray.

It will be wasted for us only to the extent that, when, spewing greenhouse gases, the last plane departs with its load of delegates, we're still trying to **be** what **we** were before.

Hospitality and welcome are the oldest, most fundamental duties of faith, exemplified in Sarah and Abraham's welcome to God - but do we appreciate, as we recall **that** story, how the welcome is significantly shared by the oak trees of their homeland.

Bear with me and consider that the generosity and holiness of trees in the Bible just might be so obvious as to be taken for granted by the various writers, as indeed also with the inclusion of the tree in Glasgow's city crest.

Christ approaching Jerusalem is welcomed by branches, before, with divine irony, and likewise, through human agency, the cruelty of the nails **unites** Christ with the tree.

Scripture : Genesis 9: 8-17

**God said to Noah and to his children with him,
"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,
and with every living creature that is with you,
the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you,
as many as came out of the ark.
I establish my covenant with you,
that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood,
and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."**

**God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make
between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future
generations:
I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and
the earth.
When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember
my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the
waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the
clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every
living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of
the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."**

Now, said George MacLeod, 'his Cross is every tree'. Science - never truly in conflict with faith - affirms how trees and green things give to all other creatures both food and the breath of life. Trees convey the Spirit. Jesus said: "Consider all the trees".

Trees, are the source of life and wisdom, and the air we breathe; trees and how we choose to work with them. The tree, like a wise person, that knows when to bend, rather than to break. The wood of the ark, that carried life through the flood. The branch in the dove's beak that gave the news of hope, beyond disaster. The mustard bush, that gives a home to the birds. Which -ecological- value is presented by Jesus, without ambiguity, as a very good thing indeed.

There is such green richness rooted in the stories of our faith, in which human beings are never, ever, separate from the living, growing things God makes us responsible for, and on which we also depend.

By whom - as Pope Francis pointed out in his Encyclical *Laudato Si* - by whom we are also **ruled**. We are responsible. But the Earth belongs to God, and all the creatures who dwell here.

Nor, as the Word Made Flesh, is **Christ** ever other than immersed in dependent relationship with the partners to the Covenant revealed to Noah.

That independence is a satanic illusion, part of the ongoing testing from which Christ, fully human, was not exempt.

As the Gospels of Matthew and Luke dramatically illustrate. It goes with desperate complacency over the scale of what we face, on the grounds that 'God is in charge'.

God was surely in charge when Christ was in the wilderness, but Jesus was not convinced, not even by the twisting of Scripture, to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple.

That sort of bravado was not what **those** angels were there for. Denial and evasion of the truth about the planet is not what **our** angels are here to support.

Mark's Gospel, the earliest to reach written form, has no axe to grind about portraying Jesus as some sort of superman. No need to be macho, or to authenticate his identity with extraordinary strength and endurance. Indeed, he grows and passes the test by his acceptance of the help God offers.

After his Baptism, since the skies are torn apart to reassure him of God's love and favour. No need to doubt himself.

But to grasp and act out, what it means to be simply, fully human. Sharing, therefore, down to the building blocks of life that we call DNA, everything that we also share with our partners in the Covenant.

The covenant revealed to Noah and his family is the covenant - **the agreement, the contract** - there are so many nuances here - the relationship of partnership between God. And .All. Flesh. To narrow the scope of this scripture to the human species alone, is to do **violence** to that scripture.

The story of the flood is brutal in affirming the **moral togetherness of humanity and all other living things**: it's perhaps the highest profile illustration of the completely realistic Bible insight, that Creation pays the price for human injustice: that environmental devastation, both today and thought history, is the libertine consort of the abuse of the responsibility God gives into the hands of our species.

And within our own species, greed hurts the poor first. Even before the COP Conference meets, extreme weather, the inundation of homelands, disease and war are manifest consequences of the way the rich amongst us have chosen to live. As if they were all that mattered.

Scripture: Mark 1: 9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan.

And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the skies torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan; and he was with the wildlife; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good News."

When it comes to the Temptation of Christ, all **Mark** tells us is where and who was involved. It's quite a cast list, quite the dramatis personae.

First of all: the Wilderness, **who** with the Prophet Isaiah can **experience** joy and gladness [35:1]

Please, for the moment, bear with me and do not disregard the way in which Scripture insists on attributing to fellow creatures, and indeed to the Earth herself, the dignity of emotion, of personhood.

Does your homeland rejoice? Or, in the absence of the conspicuous witness of the Lord's disciples, do the very Stones shout aloud, as Jesus said they might? Perhaps we hear that cry. We must be working hard not to.

In his inaugural address, the president of the United States used language that the churches need both to hear and constantly to use: 'A cry for survival comes from the planet itself: a cry that cannot be more desperate or more clear!'

Friends, in our day, the stones **are** shouting, and the ice cores of the melting arctic **are** shouting, and the burned and dried earth **is** shouting, and the rising, boiling acidic seas **are** shouting, joining with the chorus of beautiful creatures extinct before their time.

Does any of that matter to you?

Now, even with fellow humans, immediately at the point at which, for reasons of race, class, religion or whatever, can tear away our gaze and think 'it' rather than 'who' - immediately we break off relationship, and covenant, then immediately we feel set free to exploit, to abuse.

Looking Creation in the eyes re-engages our conscience, whatever state it might otherwise have been in. The Earth, says Pope Francis, is entitled to the love and respect due our mother, our sister.

To withhold such care from Earth or from family is equally barbaric.

And so it is, in our Gospel reading, that Wilderness, is not just location, but a key player in the authentication of Christ.

Nor is the sorrowing, rejoicing, wilderness a place devoid of life.

Some writers, and perhaps translators, got carried away with the idea of the 'wild beasts', with whom Christ shares his time of testing. As if we're just floundering around to gild the lily of the heroism of Jesus in the abode of demons. Laying it on thick. **Wild. Beasts.** These are two pointlessly alarming words, which is why I'd like you to think again:

Jesus was **with** the wildlife. There's no antagonism implied. It's not necessary to read it that way.

Indeed, if you ever get the chance to see the ancient high cross at Ruthwell, you find the creatures of the wilderness depicted, not just in fellowship, but **adoration** of Christ.

Jesus, the wilderness, the wildlife - who else is there?

In the wilderness- simply the place without people; the place untamed by human regulation- we also find Satan, that keenly critical character from the Book of Job - who, when thus named (**the name Satan means something like 'the opposition'**) rigorously holds to account anything which might look like justice or integrity.

We rely, again, on Matthew and Luke to elaborate on the details, when they portray the Tempter as the voice that lays the traps of false help; of fixing the symptom, rather than transforming the situation.

Finally, and most challengingly for some who like to see themselves as modern and sophisticated, there are the angels. You could read that minimally as 'messengers' though I think angels is a fair translation. Angels, agents of Creation. God is the maker of heaven and Earth, of sky and soil.

Please don't think of your response to the crisis as 'fighting' climate change. The Earth is not our enemy, though perhaps we have treated her that way. Look for the help that God offers to our hunger, our emptiness.

When we become aware of a wilderness, who is there for us? Whom will we welcome. And from whom must we turn away?



LENT 2

Song : Friends of Christ Jesus, partnered with life

Written with the tune to 'We have a Gospel to proclaim' in mind (Walton/Fulda LM).

God does not do what it is for us to do, though the gift of discernment and the sharing of the Covenant with 'all flesh' are channels of God's love, guidance, and justice. And yes, the church has a special, but not exclusive place in this, in an age when redemption cannot be reduced only to metaphor.

1) Friends of Christ Jesus: partnered with life;
Daughters and sons, and siblings who breathe
the holy air, and bathe in seas
of water from the depths of time

2) God called our species into being:
set forth our task of shepherding and care;
though broken trust and selfish fraud
have scarred the landscape of your love.

3) King now, we call you, Lord, and more;
though from our dawn, you delegate:
A servant Christ, Creation's friend
A Wind that blows as sails unfurl.

4) Can we command the wind and waves?
Can we make just injustice raw?
Can we exploit and know no end?
Alas, we've tried: a wounded world!

5) We need your help - this much is clear!
And wisdom to use every gift.
And listening to Creation's voice.
And love, to bring fresh Good News home!

Scripture Mark 8:37-38

Jesus said:

those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

Mark's Gospel never beats around the bush, nor hangs around. I've sometimes read the whole of it out loud at one sitting with a congregation: and that's scary: we're carried along with the pace and momentum of it.

Jesus, with Mark, is very very wary of anything - even common sense - which might slow him down. Sceptical of the wisdom of the gradual and incremental. The wisdom we love so well. Making small changes, not to get used to change, and get moving, but as a smokescreen to hide and postpone the real thing.

Mark's dramatic urgency is certainly a gift to us all in this time when wholesale drastic action to change the way we live, and reckless, impatient prayer to change the way we think and feel, turns out to be the world's lifeline.

In each life and every life. The cross of Christ leads the way.

At first hearing, Jesus does seem to be talking nonsense. Or sowing the seeds of despair.

Whatever you do, you lose. The life we do have, willy nilly, is passing away.

But then it hits us: globally, nationally, individually: and even as preachers and teachers, we're tempted to try to cover up the screaming relevance of Jesus' words.

Our choice of life is between single-use, disposable, or life recycled. Repurposed for the Gospel.

Something has to be let go of.

And you're going to lose a life, let it be the life that kills the planet.

And yes, the word we read there as life can also be read as "soul": your eternal identity: everything that defines you will be put at risk by the desperate attempts to preserve and prop up the way things are.

This is no future prospect: we're right in the middle of crises which even the experts can barely digest: extinctions and a rise in freak events in nature. Migration, disease. Yes, the pandemic is a symptom of how we've treated nature.

Which life is being lost, which are we trying to preserve?

And today it is profit, dominion; today it is the global economic system which values endless economic growth over the soul of the planet, and the welfare of humanity, which needs to be recognised as quite literally toxic and self-destructive.

Not just a preacher's hyperbole from ancient Palestine.

The status quo, its values, its power-structure, is killing the world which it hopes to subdue. And dragging all of life down with it. The most vulnerable, of course, who cause it least, go first.

Churches have not been immune. Considering how relatively easy it is to shift money around, it's taken far too much effort and argument for those who make decisions

about investments to hear the cries of sisters and brothers in world churches who pointed out the historic similarity of profiting from investment in slavery and investment in fossil fuels.

Some took notice, and switched to sustainable investments. or took the plunge with ambitious targets to be carbon neutral. Others have held on until, with the virus-driven collapse of oil prices, they ended up doing the right thing for the same old reasons.

Churches are not immune from the Gospel, but then Jesus did not evade the cross.

He let go of life for the sake of the Good News. We have a world to let go of, to share in the fullness of life he found.



LENT 3

Song: Sing of heav'n: then sing of Sky (Fits tunes for 'For the beauty of the Earth)

1) *Sing of heav'n: then sing of Sky*
Sing of Spirit: Wind that blows
where the Breath of life decides;
Sing of Earth, to know God's Love

Christ who shares our nights and days:

Flesh and blood in grounded praise.

2) *Good news for all creatures now-
great the purpose of your Church:
open minds, and bless research
in the turmoil of our time,*

3) *When we hide behind a "faith"
built on fine words and obscure
wake us firmly, reassure:
summon from sparse hiding place:*

4) *Though Creation may be marred
Though the future may be hard;
Hope beyond hope, joy and grace:
still are gifted: Christ's embrace:*

Scripture Psalm 19 1-4 (NKJV adapted).

Please do look at different versions. to compare.

***The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the skies show forth the work of God's hands
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their sound has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.***

What do we gain in translation? As a professionally qualified linguist, I'm well aware that not just words, but whole ways of thinking may not have an exact equivalent in another language.

Is this a problem for Christianity? Actually quite the contrary. At least, it's an advantage when we're aware of it: because there's not a single verse which reaches our ears exactly as it was first spoken or written.

Time is long past when we should have got used to that, and celebrated it, because we listen for God's Word in Scripture in the very good company of the saints and scholars; the whole church in heaven and earth. Along the way, we pick up nuances, gems, ...and stones in our shoes.

That's why it's instructive rather than alarming to look over hugely differing versions of Psalm 19: for my purposes as Environmental Chaplain, it's actually the more recent

ones that I most struggle with, simply because they over-prioritise the human perspective.

My thoughts are not your thoughts, says God to Isaiah, and yet, in living memory, and usually with the best of intentions, the radical inclusiveness of Bible writings, allowing the Earth and her creatures a voice of their own, has been...at best sidelined, and sometimes actively erased.

Or even, because we're trying so hard to be rational and sensible people, poetry and storytelling are looked down on, rather than being recognised as the most sophisticated technology we've ever been given with which to encounter reality.

The covenant revealed to Noah after the flood is a covenant with all flesh, not just with all people. The Book of Job sets our place in Creation in God's perspective; The Word is made flesh, though sufficient vocabulary was available to the writer of John's Gospel to specify humanity first and foremost.

As we shake off the yoke of a culture which insists that God cares only for one species, and all others can go to hell, so we find wisdom in Pope Francis's statement in his ground-breaking encyclical 'Laudato Si' that the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism¹ unconcerned for other creatures.

Anthropocentrism, that big word, if we can say it without tripping over our tongue is that self-defeating human bigotry, pig-ignorant both of our complete dependence on and responsibility to fellow creatures, and the arrogance, which really has impacted our faith, our liturgy, our prayer and our actions for justice in the world. For you cannot help humanity by ignoring the earth, ***nor*** the earth by ignoring what humanity is up to. For surprise surprise, what hurts the earth invariably also hurts the poor.

If my work this year is in preparing churches for the United Nations Climate Conference in Glasgow, the biggest gift I can offer is to rattle this cage of Anthropocentrism, and encourage us all to listen out for the Creation Bells that ring in our scripture, and yes, in everything that defines us as Christians. The green thread runs strongly through it all, binding it together.

Simply to grasp with humility our -admittedly special - place as creatures amongst God's creatures will be a huge step forward in our spiritual preparations for this momentous year.

So what was it that diverted me into this wee rant - well if go to the internet and search out the many versions of Psalm 19, you find exactly this, that though most of them concede that the skies, the heavens, are telling of the glory of God, the more recent can't cope with the notion that Creation's many languages are the heritage of all human speech. They play down the ways in which ***all our language, all our thought*** is, in fact, rooted and nourished by the conversations, the communion of Creation, for there is no speech or language -not even our own - where those voices are not heard.

But we do ***so*** need to listen.

¹ Some might suggest that this is better described as anthropomorphism, but don't worry about it.



LENT 4

Song: We creatures of creative power

(DCM irregular: Kingsfold or 'The Rowan tree' as set in CH4 540

A hymn, for churches, to rise to their calling as carers of the Earth.

To note: 5th line of verse one is to emphasise - in line with orthodox Christian doctrine of the Incarnation - the full, and physical humanity of Jesus, made, as we are, of the Good Earth.

We do not worship God's Creation, but with his body, God does! Taking Incarnation with serious depth also implies that in Christ, all our biological history, and our startlingly close relationship to other living creatures, is taken into the heart of God. Nor is there any conflict here with science, which observes and reveals the signs in which, by grace, and only with the help of the Spirit, the Word of God may be discerned.

1) We creatures of creative power:
bright threads, of God's hand wove';
with every creature great or wee;
contrasting grief and love.
In Christ God **is** the fertile earth;
for Jesus, shares our tale:
from when primeval cells divide:
to life today: so frail!

2) We sing of saints and martyrs who
by grace have shared our toil;
Yet wide the welcome life entails:
all life shares air and soil.
The family shaped by Rainbow Vow
cries out in diverse joy;
yet brute "dominion" twists and tears,
dividing, to destroy.

3) Though sabbath healing manifests
in earth and sea and sky;
Though ecosystems still bring forth,
evolve, diversify,
our human race ignores our place:
(as shepherds, stewards, friends)
and prizes greed in face of need
Earth's cry to heaven ascends!

4) Turn back! repent! live differently!
Come! Learn another way!
As all our **scriptures** witness Christ,
Creation has her say:
With Spirit's help we can discern
The Word from God today:
to tend, to cherish, change, rebuild;
create : like God, at play!

Scripture John 3:14-16

Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever trusts in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Well, here we are, the fourth Sunday in Lent, so often overlaid with the flowers and chocolates of Mothering Sunday that Jesus doesn't get a look in.

Which is fine and good, and yet here, in John's Gospel, Bible poetry strikes again: in the verse just prior to perhaps THE most beloved and bequoted sayings of the whole of Scripture. John 3:16 -God so loved the world, the Earth, the whole caboodle - that God gave his only Son. Fine. Inspiring. Amen.

But one verse back and here's Jesus waffling on about snakes and wildernesses. Baffling? But between the lines it's about how a focus on Christ clears the way for a life recycled, not merely into endlessness, but rather into a fittingness to the age we're part of.

A life in the ecosystem of God.

'Eternal' is such a rich and **undervalued** word.

Our eternal life in Christ begins not with our death but with our **trust** in him; with a healing of our relationship with the things that are killing the world beloved of God, and indeed, threatening the life and stability of our own human race.

So I wonder, in this day and age, **can you get much greener** than this stuff about snakes?

Why?- because Healing, and indeed, **making peace with** Creation, is what it's about.

In the Old Testament reading from Numbers 21, that Jesus refers back to, when the Israelites were not only fed up with the journey and the survival rations, but also beset by a plague of poisonous snakes, they put two and two together: that their destructive grumbling and their suffering from the snakes were connected.

I'm interested that the Bible does not actually confirm this, but rather presents this story in sequence. Hardship, non-constructive grumbling, casualties from the snakes, leading to prayer, and some sort of solution, though it's nothing like as neat as the people were asking for:

They wanted rid of the snakes: God offered a way to live with them. A vaccine, if you will.

As I was growing up, (though absolutely not any more), talk of Creation in worship was a soft option. Fluffy bunny stuff. Some of the most loved hymns were seen as trivial, simply because they expressed our awe and wonder as we contemplate the beauty of the Earth.

There is something in this. Awe and wonder and inspiration are a perfectly valid response as we life up our eyes to the hills and mountains on the skyline of this city, and yet, without malice, **nature wants to eat you.**

For good or for ill, some of these conflicts are built into the mystery of the world's creation. The world is made for God, not for us.

There is, for instance, goodness in the relationship, of wolves and their prey, and we've seen how taking note of that can enrich a whole ecosystem. Every living thing finds a different relationship.

Beautiful, and infinitely complex nature remains red in tooth and claw, and the tough - can I say mystical? - relationships of predators and prey have a shockingly brutal side.

We can't accuse the bitey snakes, sent by God, of malice. Nor even the virus of our day, though, like the Israelites, and with the hindsight of science, it might dawn on us that our concrete choices, our behaviour, in some way contributed to the situation.

We're not told that the snakes either went away or stopped biting people. But through prayer and ingenuity combined a way forward was found.

And this is the model Jesus takes as to how he expresses God's love for the world. To make of a new relationship with what seems danger a sign of healing, and indeed of wisdom.

Whatever you're getting up to in response to the climate crisis, please don't think of it as a 'fight'. Creation is to be befriended, not annihilated. Perhaps that's a far more demanding prospect. In which, all the more, we fix our eyes on Christ.



LENT 5

Song: Come saints and trouble-makers

[whatever tune you usually use with 'O Jesus I have promised' Wolvercote probably fits best']

1) Come saints and trouble-makers:
all passionate with good will;
as signs emerge; take note now
the Good News to distil:
Good News for every creature
that's threatened in our day:
Good News, as in the darkness
we stumble on our way.

2) Come saints and trouble-makers:
love with integrity
the urgency of action
in solidarity.
Not what we earn will matter
nor who deserves to live:
when partnered with Creation
to heal and to forgive.

3) Come friends of Jesus, fearful
of news we daily read:
who hide behind tradition,
seek refuge in our creed:
these very gifts are given
by grace, to cheer and feed:
to make of us Christ's creatures:
the gift the Earth shall need!

Scripture: John 12:20-25

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

I don't know what size delegation the nation of Greece will be sending to the Climate Conference in Glasgow this year.

But I wonder if they, or any other scientists or diplomats would be bothered to come and talk to the churches.

Maybe, that time has come and gone. It runs to years, no, decades now, that scientists have been making plain to the nations of the world that we've reached the end of an age, and like it or not, change will come, and better we see it coming than pretend it won't. It prompts us to think hard, but not long, on a conjunction of science and faith in care for the Earth. We know the score: why wait for more?

John Kerry, US Climate spokesperson, calls the COP conference in Glasgow the 'Last Best Hope' to avoid things getting completely out of hand.

Who are these **particular** Greeks, in John's Gospel, and what are they doing at a Jewish festival? There have been lots of wise and scholarly answers over the years, though the strand I'd like to go with is this:

That Greeks are geeks. They're the nation caricatured as learned philosophers - like the magi that we think of as **wise men** at Christmas. It might be a leap to read them, in our context as scientists. But faith in crisis leaps for life .

I'm fascinated that it's at the very point at which these geeks, (er... **Greeks**), eager for knowledge, come looking for Jesus, that his mission gets into overdrive. When Jesus finally chooses to leave stability behind and embrace, at first, an ending.

What I might suggest, is that we're overdue, and everyone knows it, to let go of our fondness for grossly unsustainable ways of life, and with them, the inequalities and injustices which Scripture amply shows they hang out with.

We also need that reminder that they don't put on gravestones any more, though it's loud and clear in older cemeteries in our land. I'm not quite sure when it was that carvers and families abandoned the tradition of including hourglass, skull and crossbones, and the reminder - memento mori - "remember, you will die" - on gravestones. I don't think the families for whom I led funerals would much have appreciated those *particular* words of God, because, perhaps, to current eyes, where we let death come over as shameful and as a failure, that might seem like adding insult to injury. We've fallen out of touch with St Francis' gentle sister death.

Yet unless, with this Jesus from John's Gospel, Christ, we can befriend mortality, become reconciled to endings, I wonder if we'll take sufficient notice of the ample warnings God has given us.

About the life, we love, that will be, must be lost, though how we manage the nature of its losing has become more important than we ever could have imagined.

Jesus speaks so strongly of a life to hate - but should we not hate the life of exclusion which is shaped by hatred of Creation? Should we not hate poverty, inequality, injustice, sexism, racism, homophobia and more?

When we love our fellow creatures, will we not rather hitch a lift on the hope of life transformed as ages really really turn?





These thoughts are produced by Rev David Coleman, working as Environmental Chaplain with EcoCongregation Scotland.

Intended for devotional use, so be kind!

Please get in touch to arrange a visit, whether online or in person.

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