

Working with EcoCongregation Scotland brings many Moses moments.

The things from which, in my previous ministry, and perhaps in all our churches, we would, until now have felt duty-bound, by pressure of work, to walk on by on the other side.

And continue to ignore in particular, the deeply-*rooted* immersion of our scriptures and traditions ...IN... the holiness of the Earth, not just in that remote location ‘beyond the wilderness’, but the Good and Living Earth.

The Earth in which Jesus is incarnate, the flesh which the Word of God becomes. The dust of which we do well to know we’re made. Which we could also choose to *see* as dirt. Which makes it no less holy. Like a bit of old wood, or a venerable tree, which has seen people come and go.

We do well, when the things we rely on are endangered, not to be protected from them. Though they may need protection from us!

A missed opportunity, we learn today, has something of tragedy about it. Yet even tragedy opens up opportunity. Signs wonders and warnings open up that divine grace of opportunity.

Those who don’t learn from disaster forget that in tragedy, God is never saying ‘nothing’.

We face a pile-up of environmental crises we shorthand as ‘climate’; wondrous anomalies and signs of the times, which daily or even more than that, bombard us “requiring” more than a double-take.

And yet often, just getting through the day, or to the end of the week blanks out the compulsion Moses felt

(and take your pick from translations as to whether that was an obligation [I MUST] or a combination of curiosity and the freedom to act on it)..

The compulsion to step for a moment out of business as usual, because an anomaly comes to light, from what was expected.

I’ve seen plenty of film versions: Ten Commandments, the Prince of Egypt - and they have in common, that things *slow down*: peaceful background music softens the setting. The tape for the voice of God running at half speed, deep and slow, with a nice echo thrown in.

Inspiring interpretation!

All urgency on hold. But read it again, and see if that’s the only way!

We can only speculate as to the landscape and foliage that Exodus implies. Not entirely barren as it had to feed the hardy middle-eastern sheep who are Moses’ first responsibility.

But today, when those same fires, though which over centuries, indigenous people have managed the fertility of the land... those same fires, are so apocalyptically out of hand, the miracle would be that it was the *only* bush *not* consumed.

Amazingly all the English versions concur: this is not a flame-*proof* bush. It is **blazing**.

Trees suffer. We always knew that, but some of us insisted on waiting for scientists to do their bit and prove it, as they also did for the bizarrely disputed matter, settled by Psalm 42 three thousand years ago, as to whether deer suffer by being hunted.

We're long past that waiting game with respect to the balance of climate, oxygen, carbon and all their cycles which we have counted on, and even built their regularity into the Bible. Even heaven - which is always also the sky - is in danger.

The bush, the tree, like the Hebrew slaves, is in misery. Crying out. It should be, rationally, too late to do anything.

But it isn't. And it isn'tbecause of someone who is sure they're the wrong one for the job. Though the bush is "**not consumed**" we don't hear that no **damage** is done. The bush is blazing, for goodness' sake.

The Blazing Bush presents life in the extremity of urgent danger, and desperate need of intervention, which improbably, and therefore like our own devotional response as churches and as nations to the misery of the exploitation of the living planet, requires us to do what we alone can do. Does God require it too?

Our own special participation in God's healing of the planet...

Don't deceive yourselves that this is about fixing things, or restoration, or putting things back the way they used to be.

But do be convinced and determined, that, **not** excluding prayer, meaningful help can always be offered, from your hospitality to the bees in your window-box or garden, to giving your vigorous and good-humoured support to our amazingly well-informed politicians and leaders, to get on with what they know they ought to do, but are afraid of how we'd react to the immediate up-front cost. Use your voice, use your vote, for transition is a must, but transition must be just, and without climate, gender, racial and economic justice, that vital transition will be further delayed.

Whist being wary of the arrogance of indispensability, each of us remains irreplaceable. To share Demand Tutu's joke "we're not accidents. Some of us might look like accidents...."

But since COP has not done the job for us, then every single prayer and action emerges as all the more valuable.

The longer story of Moses should also grab us, to the extent that we are participants in the global fossil fuel economy .

Moses, had enjoyed a privileged lifetime on Egyptian side. Until that horrific anomaly, when he sneakily murdered the Egyptian abuser of the Hebrews. Not well-received by the slaves he was defending.

If we ever identify with Moses, then for now, being honest, it's more *that* sordid incident: we slag off the greenwashers and the oil companies, the factory-farmers then get into our car and drive up the road for a methane-burger.

Until the gas prices go through the roof, pushing more of us and our neighbours over that tipping point into full poverty. Which is a destabilising factor we need to keep an eye on.

Who is the scapegoat when the worst off can't keep their homes warm? Is it the fossil fuel suppliers? Is it governments who thought that an intermediate step from coal to slightly cleaner gas was enough? We knew this was coming, but will anyone ask why we haven't got on with retrofitting our housing stock, and indeed our church buildings, for a low-carbon economy and creating the jobs that will flow from it? Is it too late? of course not.

Perhaps the Blazing Bush should be paired with the story of the Good Samaritan: where Holy folk were confronted with the compelling anomaly of a traveller in deadly need. Half dead, and missing every resource for survival, though in fact, though not quite consumed. And they did nothing, whereas the implausibly good Samaritan...

I remember a sermon in which, referring to the story, coming up, of the woman who poured perfume over Jesus' feet, the preacher described our life and work in the church as pure nard.

Luke 13 allows us to see the work of EcoCongregation Scotland, and the many Christian organisations with whom we're in partnership as something equally fragrant, but less glamorous.

Fertiliser- thanks to the ways in which the life of the soil and many humble creatures break down and recycle what larger animals have finished with.

It may be a mucky business, but where there's muck, there's, if not brass, then perhaps blessing. With Moses' feet in the ashen ground of holiness.

By the time the gilded Jerusalem Temple had been built, the holiness of God had become a radioactive core: layers of security kept the masses at a safe distance, and exclusive staff who

ventured close to the Holy of Holies behind the veil of the Temple, were required to wear protective clothing.

And yet, as would be well known to all the Temple staff, Moses, the sheep-herder, way out beyond even the wilderness, is invited to soil his naked feet with holiness;

What determines what is right for us? What are the signs of our times?

The resurrection of Jesus, which we'll mark in a few weeks' time, involved an explosive protest *for* connection with Creation, when the Temple Veil was torn in two.

The self-isolation of God, whether or not, for a while, that had been right, was brought to an end.

Compassionate well-meaning Christians may feel they're on difficult ground here: it doesn't look neighbourly, and it's something, that, given the shameful history of the sectarian abuse of Christianity we should be wary of, to risk the suggestion that our way of holiness supersedes or abolishes even a branch of another faith tradition, especially the one in which Jesus grew up.

But just as we don't need to belittle or look down on our parents, our teachers, or the foundations of our faith in order to value the inspiration that sustains us, so too, as we consider our faith in the new and urgent environment of climate crisis, we have no cause unduly to waste time by spitefully impugning the integrity of previous generations - unless we can see actual harm being done, or worse still, perpetuated out of loyalty to tradition.

A case in point would be the insistence on using "man" as definitive of the human species, when the Greek of the New Testament frequently makes distinctions between human in general, men, and women. And in days of Code Red, when the empowerment of women is demonstrably a key aspect of global response to the crisis, it's *no trivial matter* to make it look as if the role of "someone who owns a vineyard" has to be played by a man.

Who is it, in your experience, who nurtures the plants, who works close to the Earth?

Nor, since our use of the Bible is primarily devotional rather than historically forensic, does the defence hold up, that men were invariable property-owners, especially as the early church was bankrolled by women "out of their own resources" [Joanna, Susanna and friends Luke 8] and the first European convert was Lydia, the independent businesswoman, a dealer in purple.

What fertile conditions of the planting of the tree of Scripture in immediate time and place will enable fruit of justice [Matt 2:8 etc] to be born of our relationship with the *many* voices with which it feeds *us*?

It's seldom Jesus meek and mild - more often blunt and wild. Weaponising the political and structural tragedies of his day, though completely unlike the hate preachers of ours who seize

upon some disaster or other as an excuse for scapegoating a minority whose orientation or lifestyle didn't fit the preacher's credential. That should earn our horror, our anger.

But Jesus has no scapegoats, only warnings.

Jesus commands our attention: **disasters do happen, and they do have causes.** And we *are warned*. Whether we are good or bad people is not the point; rather, are we people who take notice? - as Moses took notice, of signs of life already beyond more than tipping point, yet not beyond help. Not beyond hope. Not beyond our solidarity