



An environmental chaplain treads a tightrope. On the face of it I seem to work with enviable freedom: I can take or leave the various invitations which trickle in.

For some, my presence would be merely ornamental. Or just filling a gap. (They don't get priority. - or if I **do** go along, they're liable to get a green wolf in sheep's clothing).

Some genuinely wish to listen, and some like to think they do. I take this at face value. Both of those score higher on allocating diary slots. There are things I wish to say and those I might *aspire to wish to*. And plenty I need to hear, too. Over and above the terrifying news I hear each day about the state of health of the Earth. Stories of local congregations' green initiatives bring a healing balance.

But as to what I **can** bring: my hands are tied by global circumstance. By the searing experience of COP at close quarters, and by the repeatedly alarming announcements from the UN. I can't make these things unsaid, unhappened. And the knowledge that the Ukraine war, blotting out climate concerns, is both a symptom of 'our addiction to fossil fuels' [Admiral McGann, US Navy] and a cause of even greater damage and danger to the environment. The climate crisis gets worse, not better, when we look away. And though I may be somewhat less in danger of being hung drawn and quartered for saying what I have to say, nonetheless. "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen." [said Martin Luther, reputedly, on trial for heresy, 501 years ago].

I hope I'm lacking Luther's obsession with his own guilt and unworthiness, but I know enough to know that I'm a long way from being a great example of a life lived green. But as with others, doing what I can is a start. And that means, as far as possible, 'zero waste' of the resource that the chaplaincy has become for the churches of Scotland. My time is not my own, in that sense.

Few invited visitors to a church will ever have been bearers of such terrifying news, which has, over the time I've been in post, become progressively more terrifying, with the authority of 99% of peer-reviewed climate science and the notoriously cautious and diplomatic United Nations to back up that sense of urgency so counter-cultural to the churches I've grown up with. Where 'slow us down, Lord' takes precedence over 'Hosanna' (God, HELP!) or 'Lord, come quickly!'.

Colleagues have told me they couldn't dare put it that clearly, or bluntly, and with twenty plus years of the extreme pressures to which local Christian leaders are subjected by those who also support and encourage their ministry, I have understanding. I have very great sympathy.

Could or would I have said as a local pastor, with Mr or Ms X in the congregation, what I feel compelled to say as a visitor? For I'm at least notionally in conflict with something very different from opposition to Christianity as such: rather with the culture of unrecycled wisdom and faithfulness to which love, loyalty and respect is quite reasonably due.

And there is conscientious expertise, hard-won by those into whose specialisms I might at most have dipped a toe. How to run the money. What hymns are The Hymns of The Faith. What a host may impose on their guests (as in Fair trade and recycling, for instance). What is too holy to be green? (-nothing, actually-) What constitutes well-run church grounds: is it a tidy monoculture, or a bee-welcoming mini-meadow? What Scriptures go with which situation: which are to be dutifully read and ignored (because, perhaps, they're too wild and scary) and which, shorn of their grounding in the Earth, are being marshalled to prop up a status quo with might well seem all we have left after two centuries or so of decline.

And yet even the quietly and comfortingly accepted narrative of the church's eventual fading away is threatened. We're neither dead nor useless: we are custodians of treasure, even if we keep it in glass cases, or overlaid by well-meaning habits of translation and performance.

Resurrection is the ultimate recycling and repurposing; sweeping us along too, with a Saviour who is recognised not just in the breaking of bread, but in the 'Get on with it' rebukes of the Risen Christ, acting in character with all the warnings. The Good News that we are warned. The Good News that we can change. The Good News -for all Creation- that, with Christ, despair is not a story to live by.