



# SEASON OF CREATION

SEPTEMBER 1- OCTOBER 4

## SERMON NOTES WEEK 2

**Changing minds and hearts in the crisis of heaven and Earth.**  
ECS Staff

**Ezekiel 33:7-11 Matthew 18:15-20**

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This is the Sunday on which the EcoChaplaincy of EcoCongregation Scotland enters an exceptional third term. The Chaplaincy is a full-time ministry provided by the United Reformed Church for all the churches of Scotland, though the aim is that every ‘general practice’ local leader and preacher will fulfil their calling with a determinative awareness of the Nature and Climate Crisis. Training and education of church leaders in Scotland is beginning to take up this baton.

From now on, all preaching everywhere, at least under the umbrella of ‘Season of Creation’/ Creation Time has something of Ezekiel’s ‘sentinel’ about it. An awesome and scary responsibility before God to promote alertness and awareness; to place before God’s people sufficient truth and warning in a time of threats and crisis for *them* to decide on their direction. The responsibility of the preacher is not to make the decision for the people, but to leave *them* open to judgement and ready and able to choose the way of Life, even in a culture of determined hopelessness and a belief in the futility of any action to heal society or the Earth.

Ezekiel’s God cares deeply that even the ‘wicked’ get the chance to change, though offers no complacency or immunity should the ‘righteous’ stupidly choose injustice.

Sometimes we may seem to be a lone voice, or an ‘unwelcome source of hope’, when churches (like Ezekiel’s own people) have allowed generations of decline and the illusion of irrelevance to

define their identities. The burden of programmes of reorganisation in some denominations block the horizon and drain energy to such an extent that the message of 'the end of the world' - but also the associated 'closeness of the Kingdom' come across as light relief!

And yet we can grasp that in days of Nature and Climate crisis, even the expected grim and boring future is off the menu. To live by a different story may lead to a different outcome.

Yes, our message IS for the churches, as Ezekiel's was for 'the House of Israel', and it may as well *-or far better* - be proclaimed by a whole congregation committed to environmental prayer and action as by any individual.

The awards programme of EcoCongregation Scotland offers something like that, and if the Romans passage for today is included, we note the completely appropriate place of 'Christian competitiveness' : to outdo one another in showing honour, which is a reality I once experienced as a guest of churches in American Samoa. Can we outdo one another in showing honour to the Earth?

The Ezekiel and Matthew scenarios differ: Ezekiel has the uphill responsibility of informing a whole community; the advice given in Matthew is on the loving attention to dissenters and deniers within the community: those who might without determined care, do harm to the resolve and the mission of the church.

In recent months we have seen a growth in the availability of 'climate-denying' material, some of which is very competently written or filmed, though the starting points and conclusions are completely bonkers - like the suggestion that greenhouse gases, already at a dangerous level, should be doubled. In most congregations, *someone* will have been taken in by the bogus authority of such material. It's a pastoral task, not to beat them down or bully them, but lovingly take them in hand. We need everyone on board, and the gifts and commitment even of those who begin as sceptics and deniers. We've seen that hearts and minds can change. In fact, that's the business of the Church!

A final thought: in a Unified Creation of Heaven-and-Earth/Sky-and-Soil, *of course*, what we 'bind or loose' impacts on the climate of the whole. The crisis of Climate and Nature is in the most real sense a crisis of Heaven and Earth; for whatever else we need to mean by 'heaven', in Scripture, it also always remains 'sky'.