



Rev David Coleman

EcoCongregation Scotland

**Community and
Local Energy
Show Floor
Theatre**

10:50-16:45, 15th May

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In the beginning ... or as soon after as makes little difference God ***recycled*** the world. And then again. And again.

And if you haven't dashed for the exits already, welcome!

Let's see what we can recycle and repurpose in a quarter of an hour of your time.

This is ***the*** conference which has changed the way ***I*** think and speak, in relation to the crisis of nature and climate, which, has also called into being many of the industries represented around us. ***And*** undermined countless knee-jerk objections to a just transition to a sustainable economy. For which, I hope, everyone should give thanks.

My name is David, and I'm the only ***full-time ordained*** EcoChaplain in Europe. I work with churches, colleges, and people of other faiths. My post is provided by the United Reformed Church, I live in a Church of Scotland House, and vitally supported by the Episcopal Church. Over the last six years I've visited communities from the Borders to Shetland. I've preached from Whitelee Windfarm which is probably powering us right now, attended the COP26 Blue

Zone, and been welcomed to the European Marine Energy Centre on Orkney.

Churches - even small local congregations - have been **early** adopters of heat pumps and solar panels, and there've been high profile leads elsewhere, given by Kings College Cambridge and York Minster, confronting attitudes which **still** present climate action as at odds with heritage values.

The **crises of nature and climate** are counter-cultural in that they are not simply amenable to **solutions** as such, but only **responses**.

If your identity is defined by control, rather than negotiation, these crises are all the more existentially threatening.

Because as Pope Francis noted in 2015 - our own wellbeing is **governed** by the Earth. Whose health should be an unavoidable matter of concern.

It was COP26, on this very Campus, which gave my particular **industry** - *which like yeast in the dough is present almost everywhere else too* - the chance to discover not only what we have in common, but, as those scientists in COP told us, that the things which we thought were **merely beautiful and therefore expendable**, were indispensably necessary for our life, our economy, yes, our businesses.

Your business needs bees!

The scientists in COP were also mission-minded: they employed what churches call an 'apologetic': reaching out to people whom they presumed **could only** see Creation as a **commodity**, by translating the carbon capture value of a

great whale, via *offsetting-trees-equivalent*, into millions of dollars.

But the danger with trying to be all things to all people is that you lean over backwards so far that you topple over the cliff. The '***natural assets***' approach, for the ***indigenous speakers at COP***, was already a grossly offensive objectification and commodification of ***the life they know they also are***.

If you ***do*** use that sort of language, remember that it's the language, ***not*** those it refers to, which is a means to an end.

But why else plant trees; why else attend to methane and carbon dioxide emission, or indeed whether the extreme height of proposed turbines on the migration flight-paths of our seabirds will mean that they fly under them, rather than into them? -Unless in some way it's ***rewarding*** to you?

And maybe I need right now to attend to the scandalous misquoting and butchery of great spiritual writers:

Things like "***to labour and not to ask for any reward***"

What people miss off there is that the sentence continues with the words "***except that***" and leads to what the writer believes to be ***the*** most rewarding of all.

What is it you actually ***love***?

So likewise: be suspicious -of any spiritual macho stuff in sheep's clothing prioritising ***strong, independent, in control, and not in need of help***, because you can't feed without being fed; you can't give unless you have received.

Nor can Creation as a whole. The cult of absolute autonomy has no place on any platform which aims for the common good.

So : what is the currency - the **final form** - not just the initial money, which **means reward** to you?

What is it that **will** say to you, that you've done what you're here to do? What taste on your lips, what time to stop and think, what fragrance in fresh air, what clear running water, what children's laughter, what birdsong.....

Some of these are what we finally got a taste of in lockdown, when we didn't have a choice **but** to change, for a while.

If we haven't learned from lockdown that change is possible when our hand is forced, I hope we did learn that **change is possible full stop**, in a way we didn't before.

But then we were bombarded with political desperation to forget. And the number of flights including **UK mainland domestic flights** continues to grow. And if you attend a conference, as I recently did in Italy, **by train**, you get condescendingly admiring glances, as if that's bizarrely heroic, rather than the obvious way to go.

My remit here is the things which will **"shift us, when the statistics won't"**. Statistics which are respectable, trustworthy, and readily available.

Showing we've now been over the 1.5 degree threshold for well over a year, that droughts hurricanes and seawater inundation of farmland and aquifers carries on apace; that

the GDP percentage for small-island developing states - a population comparable to that of the UK - which they already devote to mitigation is up around 9%.

And just to play that statistical game, in UK terms that would be not the Labour Party's 28 billion but something over 270. That's why 'loss and damage' - the call for investment to help them, makes sense. Why it's good for us.

Closer to home, we lost 16 million trees to storm Arwen, and half a billion damage to coastline infrastructure, like the brutal gaping hole in at the harbour wall of North Berwick. My job has taught me that people **do** take notice of what might make life good or bad for their grandchildren. It's not only there in the boring thousands of pages of the IPCC report, but in some scarily clear graphics too. Is it rational **fear** that must make us change the way we do business; change those daily decisions which cost our common home?

But here's the rub. After generations of peer-reviewed science we've learned to **shut off and disregard** what sounds "wild".

Likewise the beautiful game of liberal argument, where what matters is not right or wrong, but how skilfully you make your point, because it's bad form to completely insist you're right.

In fear of being rude, we struggle to convey a crisis very different from a matter of opinion.

For me, working to change minds and hearts, it's useful that the UN General Secretary describes **new** fossil fuel

investment - *engaged in, alas, by some of the glossier exhibitors here* - as “moral **and** economic madness”.

But that investment is still going ahead. We may be supporting it via pension funds, convinced, that they're serving us best by putting our money into what we now all know very well is the death of our neighbours, whether human or otherwise.

But in a world of instantaneous communication I do wonder how long we can maintain the fiction that these things **can** be out of sight, out of mind. Friends in Africa point out the similarities between the tragically protracted phase-out of the slave-trade and the colossally well-funded greenwashing and inertia as our species pretends to be moving on from fossil fuels. We **know** the harm that is being done. So why don't we live differently?

There are, perhaps three things that will shift us when statistics alone will not.

Fear, anger, and love. Fear is sometimes effective short term politically and otherwise. Anger likewise but I think it is Love, commitment, the things that touch your heart, and the deepest aspects of your life that will with integrity be mobilised by anyone who seeks the Common Good.

I hope this talk may have helped and encouraged you to encourage others. The question to leave you with, is who and what - but particularly who, in an inclusive way, do you **love enough** to get on with it?