

Riches in Heaven, really.



In gathering material for Season of Creation, I'm sorry that I don't actually have any budget to 'reward' contributors. It's on a 'riches in heaven' basis, and I can certainly assure every contributor of my own deep personal gratitude, as someone who, for now, receives the means of their livelihood from work on what should be an indissoluble connection between Christian faith and human care for the rest of the Creation we are.

In the course of this work, I've been deeply moved by the simple realisation that, in Bible languages, the spiritualising distinction made in modern English between 'sky' and 'heaven' is meaningless. That whatever else you mean or need to mean by 'heaven', the **skyness** of heaven should always be kept in view: that God's Creation of 'Heaven and Earth' is one unified Creation.

John Bell wrote a piece a few years ago about astronauts 'looking down on heaven' from an orbiting platform. If you can get your head round that, the rest will make sense.

People do love to get carried away with the immensity of the Universe, though this can be a distraction from this particular 'Sky & Soil' or 'Earth Sea and Sky' of the planet which is shared as home by such a mind-expanding diversity of interdependent life, but the bottle-garden of planet Earth is what we're given, what we're part of, what we share. Not as property, but as home.

This is why, a couple of years ago, I grumpily took issue with an internet 'meme' from Archbishop Justin Welby, in which he suggested that "**Prayer is not about sending requests into the sky.** It's about allowing God to make us more like Jesus Christ."

No problem with the second half, but the **inadvertent** implication, that the "sky" is some sort of neutral and pointless dumping ground, rather grated. And indeed, much of what EcoCongregations engage in does involve "**requests to the sky**". Or giving, for the good of Creation.

It's also why, when we do engage, prayerfully and practically in 'climate' or 'nature' actions, both out of love for the Earth and our fellow creatures, and in response to the crises of nature, climate, and biodiversity, there's a very real sense, even if it may not be measurable, in which we add to the 'riches **of heaven**' in the health of the climate, the treasures we enjoy and share in a breath of fresh air.

One example Jesus gives is a cup of cold water. Water, of course, is part of the Water Cycle - well-known to the Prophet Isaiah who mentioned it in the same breath as the endlessly recycled and repurposed Word of God (ch 55). That wee bit of reality does help to add meaning, and something of the 'reward' Jesus was quite happy to mention, to the horror of those dear folks among us who try so perversely hard to make out that Christian good works have to be without benefit to those who do them.

Perhaps a mid-way is to observe that **doing good** certainly **does us good**, in terms of mental health, and spiritually, even if, by the standards of our culture, it may not always be "profitable".

A while ago, I took the decision to sponsor the planting of a tree in acknowledgment of the carbon impact of each of the video sermons, of which I'm probably making about 12 a year.

It's a personal action, very much a minimum and in no sense an 'offset', in the way which is used by our society to justify the continuation of deadly lifestyles based on burning fossil fuels. Business as usual with fossil fuels is not excused

by the odd sapling. But if you fly and plant trees, why not stop flying and carry on with the trees?

Since my wee dozen added to the EcoCongregation Grove is not a 'secret' you've discovered, but something I've shared, yes, 'I've blown that aspect of my reward already', but it's not for David. Rather, this is on behalf of the community of our movement, EcoCongregation Scotland. A movement which will only continue to exist due to the sacrificial giving of members and member churches. But a movement which enriches the lives of Scottish Christians -and therefore their communities, human and otherwise.

I've just paid for **three** trees in acknowledgment of my Advent reflections, filmed at locations of pumped-storage hydro power stations. Those words don't sound glamorous. But they raise questions about the cost of our decisions to the landscape, to nature, to the Earth, to the Heavens.

For me. nonetheless, this grain of reality: a tiny addition to the riches of the Sky, **for the good of all** makes me smile. As should every 'climate' action you undertake, especially as a congregation.

Enjoy your riches in heaven. The Earth will too!