**Anglican Alliance Forum Talk Ash Wednesday 2016**

(Thank Worship leaders)

Welcome to this Anglican Alliance Forum on Climate justice – we meet very appropriately on Ash Wednesday. Thank you to all those who have made this meeting possible.

*Introduce the Anglican Alliance*

We meet as part of an on-going global movement from across the faith community and beyond that is seeking to see tangible change across the world.

The idea of this conversation is that we hear local, regional and global stories around climate injustice, and that each of us joins in this conversation whether from the platform or around our tables. There is a momentum that has been built over the past 6 months - first the newly launched SDG in September which wove the environment into the heart of the worlds response to poverty followed by the COP21 discussions in Paris at the end of last year which set out an agenda that despite some need for clarity on cost lays out targets that go far beyond what even the most optimistic campaigners had hoped for.

Thirdly many of you will be aware that the primates of the Anglican Communion recently met together in Canterbury, England. Whilst not the prime reason for their gathering it was incredible to see them begin to unite & share a common voice around the need for the 85 million Anglicans in the world to see the environment as a key priority comparable to evangelism & prayer. To witness the conservative & liberal voice, the global south and the global north begin to speak as one was very moving & we get to create the next chapter in the story as we are passed the pen to write our account and to pass our thoughts & recommendations first to young Anglicans from across Southern Africa who will meet in Lusaka in April and they, along with us will then be asking the Anglican Consultative Council when it gathers in the same location towards the end of that month to agree concrete resolutions that will see the church play its full part in the story as it unfolds into the 21st century. We must acknowledge that we are all in some ways climate hypocrites.

The key thing it seems to me is **a different kind of narrative that leads to a different kind of movement**.

Climate activists are now speaking with a strong, morally grounded voice that’s totally different from the old, leaden, technocratic language we used to hear. But it’s still what George Marshall, who wrote what I think is probably [the single best book on climate change](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dont-Even-Think-About-It/dp/1620401339) – “don’t even think about it” calls an “enemy narrative”. We’re the goodies, and others – Exxon, Shell, the Koch brothers – the mining industry are the baddies.

Those narratives have power, but ultimately I think George has it right when he says that:

“The missing truth, deliberately avoided in enemy narratives, is that in high-carbon societies, everyone contributes to the emissions that cause the problem … the real battle for mass action will be won not through enemy narratives [but through] narratives based on cooperation, mutual interests, and our common humanity”. Which sounds a lot like the gospel to me.

This implies a very different approach to how we campaign. It’s a point that Micah White, one of the co-creators of Occupy, echoes when he says that “protest is broken” and that,

“What I am proposing is a type of activism that focuses on creating a mental shift in people.”

Basically an epiphany. Which is an unusual concept on Ash Wednesday. But I think this is exactly right. We need epiphanies – possibly, but by no means necessarily, of the religious variety – that create the sense of being part of a *larger us*, of living in a *longer now*, and of wanting a *different good life* to the one that’s been sold to us.

So how would we do that? There’s no neat reply to that question, but let me begin today by proposing that figuring out how to answer it will require us as activists to think deeply about three things.

The first is **grief**. Grief is an entirely appropriate response to what we are doing to the planet and its poorest people. *Now*, not just in future generations. And part of our job – as communicators, as messengers of a different future, as *prophets*, if you will – is to acknowledge and express that grief.

The theologian Walter Brueggemann observes that in the Old Testament, prophets do three things. First, describe reality as it is (as Jeremiah does, ruthlessly). Second, to face the despair that comes from that reality (as in Lamentations). And third, to give hope for the future (as Isaiah does). Brueggemann also observes that today’s progressives are great at the first and third of these, and *terrible* at the second.

So only very occasionally do any of us express our grief about what we work on. Yet when we do – as when the Philippines’ lead negotiator – Seb Yano - broke down at the 2012 climate summit while describing the impacts of Typhoon Haiyan on his country, or in how all of us have felt in the wake of seeing the images of little Aylan Kurdi’s lifeless body lying on the beach in Turkey – there’s a raw power that can shock us out of complacency.

The second idea I think we need to think more about is **forgiveness**. Climate campaigners can sometimes seem to believe that if they can just make everyone feel guilty enough about climate change, results will follow. But people *already* feel guilty about climate change – and it’s a big part of why they don’t want to think about it. Guilt is only helpful if we can *do* something with it; otherwise it turns toxic and ultimately debilitates us.

So we need ways of recognising and expressing where we’ve screwed up, and of being forgiven.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, from 1000 BCE onwards, there is a recognition that human sin – which is usually either ignorance, or injustice, or idolatry (worshipping things rather than God) – can break the delicate web of bonds on which creation rests.

To repair these breaches, and prevent creation from unravelling, there is a process called atonement, undertaken by the High Priest in First Temple Judaism and by Jesus in Christianity. Atonement is a very deep, very powerful idea that’s inextricably bound up with ideas of self-sacrifice and rebirth.

And far from being abstract, there are very specific ways of applying the idea of atonement to social, political, economic, and environmental contexts. They’re contained in an idea we already know well: Jubilee, which was always about much more than just debt relief including a strong environmental component and twice per century resets of wealth to prevent inequality from building up across generations. (Old English word wealth – used to be more aligned to ‘common good’)

Which brings me to the third and final idea I think we need to think about: **restoration**. I’ve always hated the lame concept of ‘sustainable development’, which feels as though its aspirations go little further than stopping things from collapsing. I want a vision in which we *repair* the damage we’ve done.

In Christianity, restoration is the result of atonement – Jubilee – being done properly. It’s why the Bible ends in the same place it began: back in Eden, something I can’t help but think of when I see examples of ecosystem restoration in Ethiopia in which bare hillsides that have lost all their soil to erosion painstakingly turned back into lush forest.

And I can’t help but yearn for social restoration too – of the damage we do to people we’ve never met through our emissions, our subsidies, our financial regulations, our arms sales, and so on; or the damage our forebears did, whether through slavery, or colonialism, or historical emissions that are still in the air around us.

Religions have always been good at talking about grief, forgiveness, and restoration. But while that works for me as a Christian, there are lots of other people in our secular society for whom it doesn’t work. And it’s here that I think our real challenge lies.

We need to find new ways of talking about these issues, rather than sweeping them under the carpet. It’s an urgent task in an accelerated, techno-centric society that’s nonetheless engaged in a sustained search for stories that work, and that’s right on the edge.

It’s not the kind of thing we usually talk about as campaigners. But if our old theories of change don’t work any more – and they don’t – then we need to be ready to change too & find a new kind of narrative. I hope & pray that today we will continue the process of discovering this.

Writing our paragraph, our sentence, chapter. Sharing stories. Bringing good news to the bad news.

*‘The time has come,’ Jesus said .’The Kingdom of God is near.*

*Repent & believe the good news!’*

*Pray*

We will now follow through a series of short presentations with a chance to respond around our tables after each, they will look at Climate justice from a local, a regional, a scientific a theological and practical perspective and at the end of the day I pray that we will have some draft statements and recommendations for the worldwide communion.

Remember that the communion is global & local, it is across 140 countries and with its ecumenical and interfaith partners it covers the globe.

Roundtable timetable and aims.