

Theology in Scotland on arts and culture



Two poems

Jock Stein

Dr Jock Stein is a Church of Scotland minister who took up writing poetry in his retirement and is the author of From Cosmos to Canaan and From Ruth to Lamentations.

Stein shares the following reflection on the first of the two poems offered here:

It started off as a poem about roots, and things happening underground, like trees ‘talking with each other’. I recalled walking through one of these old Edinburgh railway tunnels, which led (naturally, I hear you ask?) to the Scottish Enlightenment, to Peter Higgs and his boson, and to Princes St Gardens, as you would expect from someone who once studied in Edinburgh and lived in a student residence overlooking the Gardens. Like those tree roots, this poem wandered around in my subconscious for a while, which of course earned a reference to Jung ... and by now you will realise that mapping a poem for COP26 is nearly as convoluted as climate change itself. I do think, however, that we all bring to the conference three things referenced in the poem:

- *The history of our nations, their technologies, their thinking – and our own histories*
- *The way all things are connected, whether you are talking of sub-atomic particles, tree roots or climate*
- *The challenge of the present set of signals, which certainly ‘whistle us into tomorrow’.*





Travelling to COP26

Sometimes we wait, deep rooted to a ghostly platform,
part of the subway that our city fathers never built,
hearing echoes of two phantom trains that rumble still,
whistling to each other as they exit silent tunnels.
Scotland needs enlightened rails today, to follow
Peter Higgs, to be a place where particles take pride
in their entanglement, where maps are coloured green,
show tracks and tales, cajole us out of past preoccupations.
Go, talk with the trees bequeathed in public Gardens,
older than the trains. Listen to their rooted tactics
underground, their touching gossip, leafy whispers
– strategy at the mercy of that Glasgow conference.
Ask old Jung about the jangle of those basement rooms
– and tangled memories that fog our reading glasses;
jumble of signals that probe our gaps and stretch our boundaries,
route maps that jostle us, whistle us into tomorrow.



Sermon on the Path

'Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap.' Matthew 6:26

A pigeon waddles down the path beside the blue thistles,
passes ranks of London Pride, brushes against some lavender,
pauses, senses love behind her, makes a heavy hop or two.
She staggers under that plump body, stuffed with easy pickings
fallen, not from heaven, but from bills of smaller birds
who strip a feeder from beyond, lacking words like nature,
unaware of food chains, no argument for staying green
except themselves.

A pile of feathers settles on the grass, signal from an aerial fight
some pigeon could not win, caught beyond her flight path into cover.
Once, a writer would extract a quill, and write a sonnet for the bird.



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Today, I choose green bin or brown, and think about those seven ages,
starting with a napped toddle, lurching from one handhold to another,
then a choreographed strathspey to feel my way to adult life, maybe
reeling through excitement, angst, bewilderment and boredom,
watching out for hawks.

Are we still of greater value than the doves, or perched uneasily,
disturbing planet earth till midnight feeds us to the birds?

Or could we set our minds upon tomorrow,

strive for kingdom virtues,

overcome the economic raptors,

hop and hope for love beyond us,

find a faith that works

in more than words?

