

Sexagesima B St Stephen's 9.30 & 11 John 1: 11,12  
7.2.21

"He was in the world and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him -  
- but to all who received him, who believed on his name, he gave the power to become children of God."

I keep six honest serving men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names were 'What' and 'Why' and  
                  'When'  
And 'How' and 'Where' and 'Who'.

Why is it that so many people get hung up over the Genesis account of creation? I suspect that the problem is they are asking the wrong question, believing Genesis to be answering 'How' the world came into existence, whereas it is actually answering the question 'Who' and, possibly, 'Why'.

It is not always easy to determine the theme running through the readings chosen for a particular Sunday. Today, the theme is much clearer; it reminds us of the wonder of God in creation and that it is God's love which holds all together and sets the whole in terms of eternity. This is a creation which has become disordered and is being brought back into harmony through Jesus Christ.

A clergyman whose wife had recently died, was travelling with his 7 year-old daughter on a liner

to the USA. He'd just taken a service on board, preaching about the love of God, which he'd found very difficult. They were now standing on deck, looking over the rail and the endless miles of ocean. After a while, the little girl asked her father: "Daddy, does God love mummy as much as we do?" "He does," her father replied. "God's love is the biggest thing there is." "How big?" asked the child. "I will tell you. Look across the sea; look up, look down. God's love is so big that it stretches round us further than all this water. It's higher than the sky above. It's deeper than the depths of the sea we're now sailing."

The child pondered this thoughtfully for a minute, close to tears. Then she grasped her father's arm and with a face radiant with joy, she said "Oh daddy - how wonderful that we happen to be right in the middle of it."

These Sundays before Lent are helping to re-focus our minds away from the incarnation and towards to momentous events of Holy Week and Easter. In today's readings we get a glimpse of God's creativity in all its diversity and richness, yet there is that darker note as we are reminded "the world did not know him; his own people did not accept him."

Today's collect sets the tone by asking that we may discern God's hand in all around us. We are to see God at work and, not least, in the lives of his people through the Holy Spirit.

Theodore Roosevelt used to go on camping trips with the naturalist William Beebe. Before turning in each night they'd look at the vast expanse of sky with the myriad of stars. They'd identify Pegasus and next to it a pin-point of light – the galaxy Andromeda. It's as large as the Milky Way with, apparently, 100 billion suns larger than our own sun. After thinking about all this for a while, Roosevelt would say: "Now I think we're small enough. Let's go to bed!"

The OT lesson for today takes up this theme, seeing the activity of God in creation as reflected through Wisdom. In the opening of his Gospel, John refers to the Word – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". And Wisdom delights in all that was created, not least in humanity itself – "..... I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in the inhabited world and delighting in the human race."

The psalmist also delights in all he sees around him: "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In Wisdom you have made them all." (Ps 104: 25). I can remember looking through a microscope and seeing how wonderful and beautiful was a lacewing's wing.

A Mr Chambers dated his break with Communism to the time when his daughter smeared porridge on her face. He found himself looking at her intricate and perfect ears. He saw there, he said,

immense design, not simply the coming together of atoms. “At that moment, the finger of God was first laid upon my forehead.”

The Epistle today echoes the redeeming work of Christ, but acknowledges the dark note contained in our opening verses. St Paul draws a parallel between the redeeming work of God in creation and the reconciling work of Christ, drawing all things back into harmony. It is Jesus, the Word made flesh, who is the source of all created things, and through him order will be restored and fellowship with God. The darkness of the Cross has a silver lining: “For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the Cross.” (Col 1: 19,20)

The Gospel today draws all these thoughts together. We are so familiar with this opening chapter of John’s Gospel that I suspect that we don’t fully grasp the depth of its claims. John set the work of creation in terms of eternity, seeing God in Christ intimately involved in the whole act of creation. As Alan Garrow has written: “Jesus, who reveals to us everything that is true about the nature of God, meets us in the flesh and invites us to enter a new experience of intimacy with God as his own children.”

A pagan Roman emperor visited a notable Jewish Rabbi, Joshua ben Hananiah, and asked him to be shown the Rabbi’s God. Joshua said that this was

impossible. This didn't satisfy the emperor, who went on demanding to be shown Israel's God. The Rabbi, fearful of the consequences of not complying with the emperor's request, took him outside and asked him to stare at the midday sun. "That's impossible," said the emperor. Joshua replied: "If you cannot look at the sun which God created, how much less can you behold the glory of God himself?"