

Sexagesima – 2 before Lent - Year B 2018

I am reading a book at the moment called 'The Best of Times, The Worst of Times – A History of Now,' by the academic historian, Michael Burleigh. In it, Burleigh looks at the world primarily since the financial crash in 2008. He articulates many of the problems troubling the nations at present. I am only just halfway through, but there is a sense that although he articulates much which should greatly trouble us – for instance the corruption of much of the political leadership throughout the world - thus far he hasn't come up with solutions! Perhaps he will towards the end of the book, although I did see a review saying that he should have allowed more optimism and sunshine into what the reviewer called '*his entertainingly pessimistic account*' of our contemporary problems. I haven't yet reached the chapters on Europe and our own nation. I'll let you know how I get on!

It is so easy to be filled with woe at the state of many aspects of life both here and abroad, that, as I have said before, we often forget the transformation which has been wrought in lifting the living standards of so many hundreds of millions of people throughout the world within our lifetimes; the increase in literacy, improvements in world health – all dramatic signs of the way in which humanity does have the capacity to bring about the true betterment of the lot of those living on the edges. Yes, there are many things still wrong, and I do believe that we should be vigilant and acting to promote peace, reconciliation and justice, fostering the knowledge that no matter what our background, ethnicity, gender, faith, or any of those things so often used to divide us, we are on the common journey of all humanity. Yes, we are all individuals yet linked each to the other through our very DNA, and this should establish our unity.

This common journey should be the call to all who count themselves as part of the Body of Christ. We are called to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom – a kingdom for all, and thus the transformation of humanity – this is one of the strands of our Christian DNA.

Were you taken aback that we have heard again, in the space of a few weeks, the great Prologue from John's Gospel - one of the most extraordinary passages of Scripture? I have spoken and written of this over the Christmas period, when we are led to contemplate the Wisdom of God.

The Old Testament give us a lovely take on Godly Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs: ²² *The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.* ²³ *Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.* ²⁴ *When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. When God marked out the foundations of the earth,* ³⁰ *then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,* ³¹ *rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. (Proverbs 8)*

It's a fantastic reflection in this figure of Divine Wisdom – always described as female in Jewish terms. It's hugely endearing but I think that John leads us even further in describing Wisdom or The Word as one of the very aspects of the Divine nature.¹ What John wants us to take on board is that when we reach that moment when, '*the Word Became Flesh, and*

¹ (or property, as the BCP perhaps rather succinctly puts it in the Prayer of Humble Access)

we beheld his glory, the glory as of a Father's only son, full of grace and truth,' then we understand **all** that we are fully able to comprehend of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

This leads us to the other reading from the Letter to the Colossians. There is no consensus about the composition of this letter. It may be by Paul, it could be later. However, what most scholars believe is that the first five verses of the passage we have heard today is probably a very early hymn to Jesus - perhaps a Baptismal hymn - which the writer used to great effect here. In its way it is as extraordinary as the Prologue – another powerful reminder that the fulness of God is seen in the Son, and that through his sacrifice on the cross we are drawn to the possibility of understanding the intimate relationship with God which is open to all. The great love God bears for each of us is shown in the utter selflessness in which Jesus offers himself upon the tree.

In recent times the Western Church has discovered the power of icons within worship. Icons are paintings which originated in the very early church designed to draw the observer on a journey towards deepening their faith. What they have never been, although some might regard them as such, are idols. Yes, for Greek and Russian Orthodox worshippers, there is a devotion to individual icons, but this is never at the expense of the further journey of faith undertaken by the beholder. Each aspect of an icon reminds the viewer of the journey of faith – a visual drawing into the divine picture. (*icon – to seem or to be like*)

I believe that WE ourselves are called to be **ICONS** of God – visible **reminders** to all we meet of the transformative love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, visible **doers** of the divine call to transform the world; ourselves, visible **pathways** to God. We will always be on a lifelong journey of faith, always finding new ways to experience and meet with God, but also hopefully always finding ways of *communicating* God to others. This is another strand of our Christian DNA!

You will remember that I started by telling you about a book called, 'The Best of Times, The Worst of Times.' In the knowledge of Jesus Christ's Love for us, **NOW** is always the Best of Times in faith terms, no matter what life throws at us; the best of times because we know that Jesus gave himself for each one of us to lead us on our journey towards infinite love. Our great mission is to reflect the light of God in all that we do, so that others too may know the saving grace of Jesus Christ within their lives. It really is up to us.

*God our creator,
by your gift
the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise,
and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:
may we who have been nourished at your table on earth
be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross
and enjoy the delights of eternity;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*



Proverbs 8: 1, 22-31

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

²² The Lord created me at the beginning^[b] of his work,^[c] the first of his acts of long ago.

²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.

²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—

²⁶ when he had not yet made earth and fields,^[d] or the world's first bits of soil.

²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,

²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command,

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker;^[e]

and I was daily his^[f] delight, rejoicing before him always,

³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Colossians 1: 15-20

The Supremacy of Christ

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,

so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ 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 his cross.

²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled^[i] in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—²³ provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

John 1: 1-14

I In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.^[b]

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own,^[c] and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,^[d] full of grace and truth.