

## Trinity V Year C 2019

Whilst on holiday I attended several lectures by Jeffrey Weinberg, an American attorney who has worked for eight or nine presidents of the United States in the Office of Management and Budget, and he had a rather wonderful story about President Lyndon Johnson. When asked about the way that the press regarded him, he said something like: 'Well, look at it this way: if I were to walk across the surface of the waters of the Potomac River today, tomorrow's headlines would read, 'President Johnson can't swim!'

Although both our Old Testament and Gospel readings have a strong focus on hospitality, they also involve questions of perception. Add to this the overwhelming imagery and richness of the passage from Colossians, we have quite a lot to ponder this morning.

The mysterious strangers who approach Abraham's tent arrive in the heat of the day – we can imagine this heat (indeed we are promised it over the next few days) – and in the space of a few verses, Abraham perceives that the Lord is at work. Hospitality is offered – something still common in the Middle East, and all described in wonderful detail. I don't know about you, but the modern western idea of hospitality is not the generous offering to share food in the intimacy we hear of here. Abraham, Sarah and a servant labour to prepare a feast for the divine messengers, a real sharing of all that they have. The strangers are offered water to wash. At the same time there is ambiguity. Abraham addresses the three as one – and indeed the encounter is one the Christian church has seen as a prefiguring of the Trinity. It is certainly mysterious.

Another element running through this particular account is laughter. Immediately before this takes place, Abraham has laughed when told in a vision that he and Sarah will have a son. They are both too old! Within a couple of verses of our reading this morning, Sarah also laughs in disbelief when the same is said in her presence. Their hollow laughs eventually become those of joy when a son is born – Isaac – whose name is based on the Hebrew word for laughter. You might say that God has the last laugh! As I said, amongst the hospitality we also have questions of how the strangers are perceived by Abraham and Sarah. The ground seems to shift – Abraham acknowledges the 'other-worldliness' of this encounter, whilst Sarah is challenged in her disbelief.

The mysterious and divine focus of this ancient narrative is very different to that of Martha and Mary's encounter with Jesus. Luke places this meeting after Jesus has set his face to go to Jerusalem. It seems fairly straightforward. The bustling Martha is busy providing hospitality and angry at the passive Mary. Recent interpretations of this homely scene have been controversial. A radical feminist reading would say that it looks like a stratagem on Luke's part to reduce the status of women to voiceless listeners or chained to the kitchen sink. If this were the case then Luke would be no feminist hero!

I think it is more profitable to look at it in a balanced way, where again perception plays its part. Martha perceives idleness on the part of her sister, whilst Mary has adopted the pose of a disciple – listening at the Teacher's feet. Jesus, whilst admonishing Martha, does so, as often occurs in such interactions, in a nuanced way. He effectively tells her that there is room for both activity and allowing the spirit to be fed through interaction with the Divine

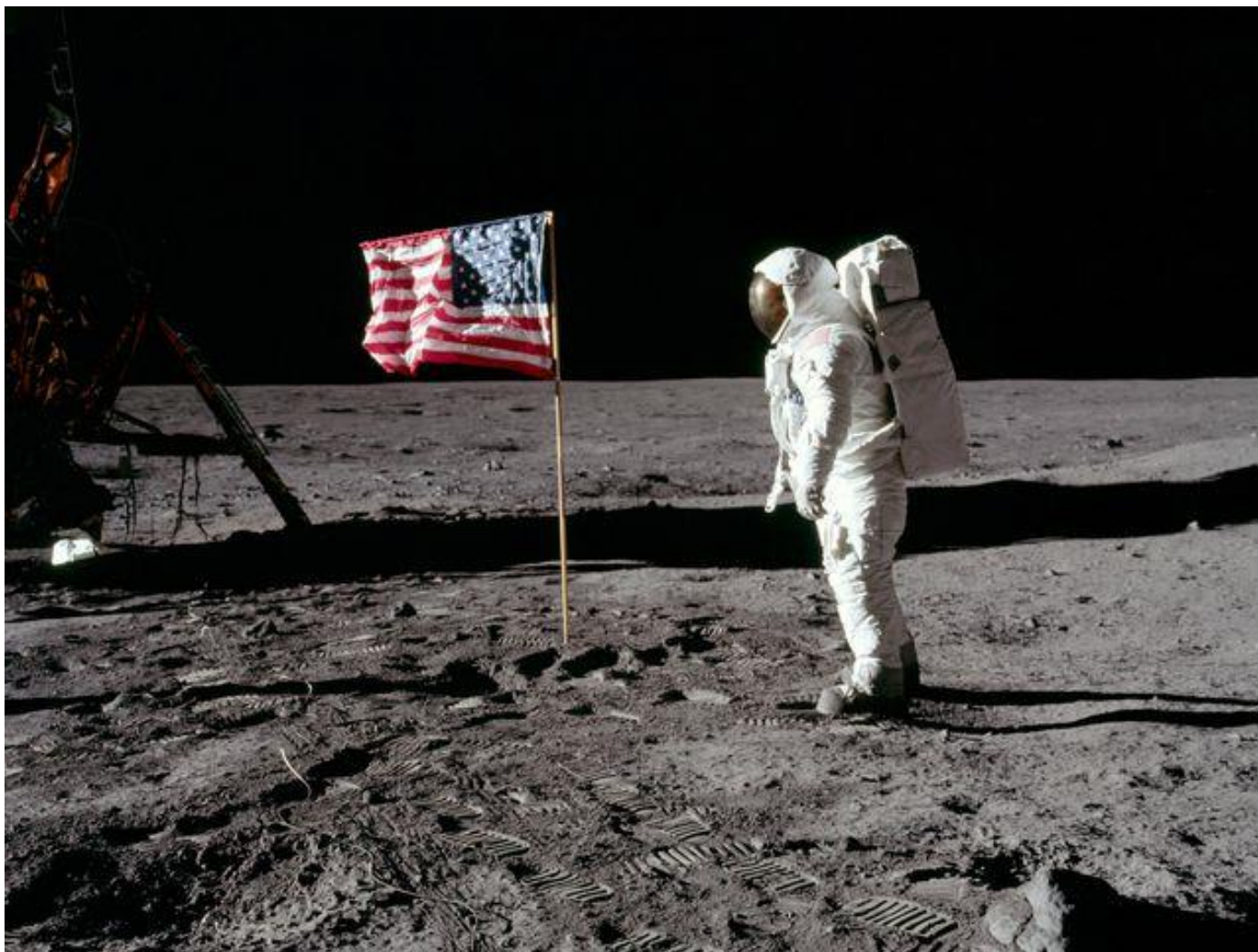
– at what ever level that might be. In fact, this is a running theme in Luke’s Gospel. Just a couple of chapters previously we have had the Parable of the Sower, where one of the illustrations of pitfalls for the effective growth of following God’s Word is likened to the seed falls amongst thorns. In other words, the cares and worries of everyday life can overwhelm us to the point where we are consumed with self. We need to allow ourselves space.

Both accounts turn the idea of hospitality on its head. Abraham and Sarah, and Martha are busy providing hospitality, whilst in fact they are the ones who receive divine hospitality which brings transformation. Although Mary is described in very passive terms, all four in these accounts will have been led towards change. They experience the hospitality of God, which is open to all and boundless in love – the opportunity to continually allow oneself to be led on a journey of light.

Fifty years ago yesterday, the lunar module touched down on the surface of the moon. Many will remember the grainy shots we saw on the television. Two and a half hours later, Buzz Aldrin called for a pause before the first moon walk took place with the words: ‘I’d like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in, whoever and wherever they may be, to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way.’ Neil Armstrong and the ground control team in Houston heard what was redacted to the rest of the world. Aldrin took consecrated bread, wine and a small chalice he had taken with him from his own church and received Holy Communion. That silence for humanity covered the linking the moon itself with the life of Christ – for Aldrin, the motivation at the heart of his spirituality, following which he read from John 15: 5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*

The radiant passage we heard from Colossians – a wondrous hymn of praise about Jesus - captures the unity of the wonders of creation with the glory of a creator God – a loving God - who makes that love known in the face of Jesus Christ. The very language takes us on a journey of the way in which we view the world.

Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins wondered at the beauty of our fragile planet, viewed from afar. So we, with faith, are called to view our interactions with the world and humanity through the eyes of wonder, perceiving every step of our journey moderated by the knowledge of our intimate connection to Jesus Christ, through whom we are called to bear fruit for the Kingdom. This may not lead us to walk on the waters of the Potomac but allow us to seek to grow in faith and to draw others to the same wonderful journey. Amidst the increasing chaos of the political world, and the reduction of public discourse to mere factionalism, ours is a message of TRUE HOPE, revealed in the face of Jesus - who gave everything for you and for me.



### **Genesis 18: 1-10a**

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. <sup>3</sup> He said, 'My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup> Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' <sup>6</sup> And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' <sup>7</sup> Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

<sup>9</sup> They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' <sup>10</sup> Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.'

### **Colossians 1: 15-28**

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. <sup>25</sup> I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

### **Luke 10: 38-end**

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup> there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'