

*St Brandon's, Sermon for 3rd October 2022.*

*Psalm 89: 5-9, 11-14 Colossians 1: 15-20 Matthew 8:23-27*

***Christ in Creation: part III of our Creation Season***

*Alison Hobbs*

We heard this morning's readings out of order, chronologically. If we were to go back in time and be with the psalmist, we would be in a time of an all powerful God who created the heavens and the earth, and everything in it, and rules it with a strong and mighty arm. *'You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.'* Hardly surprising then, that the disciples, also living in this understanding of God, are amazed when Jesus gets up from his sleep, and rebukes the winds and sea and stills them. That's not just miraculous, its specifically God's power, and God's field of operation. *"What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"* they ask each other.

Wind forward fifty years, and the Christian church is in its early stages, yet already, there is a hymn in common use that recognises Christ in creation. This hymn is essentially what Paul is quoting back to the people of Colossae with a few tweaks. That is not to say they had a developed understanding of what they were reciting, I gather they would not at that stage have had any theology of the **divine nature** of Jesus Christ, but did see that divine **favour** rested on him in a way that was a mystery beyond their comprehension.

That might be a cue for suggesting we have comprehension! How can anyone start to comprehend the enormity. Yet, with the developed teachings of 2,000 years, we are very familiar with statements about Christ's equality and unity with God as part of that trinity of Son, Father and Holy Spirit. So familiar that is, we are liable to simply accept that fullness of God in him without wondering further. This early hymn captures something of the elusive, profoundness of the implications: if in him were created all things, and all things through him and to him were created, then we are living in a world that is shot through with Christ. A world that is orientated towards him: that universal and deep down longing for love and connection that he offers is offered everywhere about us.

You and me are created in him, are his, for all eternity.

It tells us we live in a world entirely, inescapably owned and held by Christ. Christ opens creation up in a new light: his light, and the goodness of God permeating, ordering, and challenging all that is not just and Godly.

This creating force turned its attention on itself at a very particular point in history and became flesh, one of us, human in all our messyness and pain and mortality. Became one of us so we could see what it would look like to have God visible, living alongside us in our world.

Through his resurrection, the gift of the Spirit; through his living Word and the glimpses we get of Christ alive in another person in a moment of grace or grief, through these gifts, he continues to be seen in the world and offers to live alongside us.

That *'all things have been created through him and for him'*, is not a cosy statement.

Christ is about truth. God is truth, and God sits above our ideas of right and wrong.

Truth and 'niceness' are very different things.

Christ's world is not a universally 'nice' place, but we have only ourselves (universally speaking) to blame for the horrendous acts of violence that are carried out, some even in the name of God. It is indefensible, and I'm not going to try unpacking that area, suffice to say, God has no part in violence and suffering being willed on any of his children: why would he? But it goes on happening because we are unable to see the right and better way.

As our ability to consume the resources of the world to satisfy our ideas of comfort and progress increases at an insatiable rate, so too does the violence we are doing against our natural world increase at an ever faster rate.

Christ's gift of continuing to be seen in the world and his offer to live alongside us was won through his acceptance of suffering.

It was his blood, his agony on the cross and all the fears that went before it that won our reconciliation with God, that permanent access to the Father through the Son.

We have not learnt the lessons: we may abhor the violence many suffer, and seek better governance, but we are pushing humanity's chances even of survival in the way we know it by upsetting the balance of the forces of nature.

Passively, greedily, 'nicely'.

Where is God in all this?

Perhaps he is asleep in the boat.

Perhaps we are not really paying enough attention to the brewing storm.

Perhaps he is waiting for us to wake him up.

Perhaps we are going to have to get further down the line before enough voices join together and cry out to him in lament and repentance. Last week, Mike used the image of the breech baby requiring forcibly turning around: that's what repentance means, turning around, turning back to Christ.

Yet Christ **is in** the boat. He has not chosen to distance himself but be alongside, right in it with us. But he cannot do it for us: forces of nature cannot

be overturned with magic wands, that would go in the face of the truth of the physical properties of the created world.

But he can overturn stubborn wills and fearful hearts.

Christ has not lost interest and gone to sleep on the job, everything in scripture testifies to the constancy and faithfulness of God's love.

If we believe we **are** living in a world that is shot through with Christ, that we live in a world entirely, inescapably owned and held by Christ, perhaps that is where we should look.

We need to re-imagine and re-align ourselves with our rightful place in creation.

Perhaps we can start by paying more attention to creation; being grateful for all the precious gifts of harvest it offers. Being mindful of the fragility and prepared to invest more in that.

(A personal anecdote: at the beginning of the summer I was picking snails off the lettuce I was washing for lunch, and throwing them out of the window. By the end of summer, it had occurred to me that I could collect them into a jar and carry them back to a flower bed. Even snails. And I began to appreciate the beauty and alertness of these comic creatures with their sticky horns, no longer an inconvenience, in my way, but a part of the web and intricacy of life). God opens our hearts further when we make the first little chink for him.

And we can start by paying more attention to each other.

If we are trying to see God in everything, just as Jesus Christ was the image of the invisible God, so we are made in his image to reflect something of his love into the world.

Those who went to the PMC cluster yesterday (this is the new step we have signed up to as a church, it entails being Partners with other Churches who want to explore how to become more Missional. More about that anon). Those who went yesterday will have practised giving their full attention to another for all of five minutes, to hear what the other person received from a particular passage of scripture. They then had to report back to the group what they had heard.

Surprisingly difficult!

It is an ancient spiritual wisdom to look for God in all things.

Paying attention to the small. Paying attention with our eyes as well as our ears, and paying attention to emotions and needs, ours and others'. There is so much richness in our world that is freely offered to us, if we live in appreciation of a

world created and held by Christ, not a world of our own construction, reliant only on ourselves, we may feel less alone and fearful as we bob along in our boat.

*Amen*