

Sunday 8th May 2022

Prayer

Praise be to you Creator God. You are everywhere and in everything, you are the glue that holds the world together. Your creative Spirit is at work in all things and all beings have their source in you.

We praise you in nature, as we walk, as we plant, and we sit and enjoy listening to the birds singing your praise and giving thanks for the wonders of nature.

We give you praise in relationships as we care for one another, sharing together in laughter and tears, in joy and sadness but held together in your love. We praise you in the opportunities to make new friends and build new relationships, and in the opportunities to share what we have with people we may never meet but with whom we are one in your love.

We praise you in our life together as church, encouraging one another on our journeys and sharing with each other our discoveries and experiences of your presence and your love. We praise you for the stories which inspire our life together and for the message of Jesus which has revealed you in new and exciting ways that we are called to share with others.

For the whole of life, we praise you offer our thanksgiving in service and in love.

In the company of all followers of the way of Jesus we say together, Our father....

Readings

Psalm 23

Acts 9:36-43

Introduction

There are times when the lectionary reading gel together and instantly give a message, and then there are other times when you simply cannot see a connection. This week is the latter and yet there are two readings which warrant explorations for almost completely opposite reasons. One, at first sight is a story about a key figure and yet the message is a much deeper message not obvious until you get beneath the surface. The other, is so familiar and yet its purpose has been distorted and refashioned. I wonder if you can guess which is which. Now having spent fruitless hours trying to connect these two I suddenly realised they were both important for different reasons and so today we have an exploration of one, and a reflection on the other and I leave you and the Spirit to weave what you need from these two readings.

Exploration Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is probably the one Psalm that most people are aware of through its use at funerals and yet its original purpose has been buried in the mists of time. Today it is a comfort for many people of faith, who find within it reassurance, and yet if I was to ask you what it means I suspect you might struggle to explain as the language is definitely not twenty-first century.

There is much debate and a lot of uncertainty about the original meaning of the psalm and different academics have suggested different interpretations –

- Divide in two after verse 5 giving a pastoral section and a hospitality section but this does not work unless the 'table' is interpreted as a weapon!
- Some see three metaphors within a psalm of guidance for the wanderer with 'paths of righteousness, being the procession to the temple, 'table' as a sign of the covenant, and 'goodness and mercy' as qualities of God's reign.
- Prayer of a pious Jew during the Babylonian exile
- Thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies

The truth is that the original meaning is completely unknown, but the language and the essence seem to suggest that this was a psalm used during worship by a king with the image of God as shepherd linked to the Old Testament understanding of nation, the king shepherding the nation.

Over centuries, and probably mostly during the last three centuries this psalm has been adopted as a psalm of the people but the imagery is very difficult to explain to those unfamiliar with church language and personally, I think it is difficult even with knowledge of church language which overall has become a barrier between people and God. Jesus was all about making it easier for people to know God, he challenged the rituals that either did not make sense or which were a misrepresentation of God, and as such a barrier. Jesus spoke about oneness with God and each other, his message was all about interdependence, and so I believe this psalm like many of our 'traditional statements' needs some work if it is to be a statement of the Way of Jesus.

Discoveries in quantum physics are demonstrating that creation is interconnected in a way not previously understood. As Christians we believe that God is in creation, and we now understand ourselves as being 'in' creation. Jesus spoke of being one with the Father, this takes on a new meaning when we understand creation as one, all things connected. If God is in everything and everything is in God, then we are a part of that oneness. There is a new understanding that what is connected can never be disconnected, even if apart in distance the connection still exists, creation is bound by relationships, bonds of energy. We talk of this when speak of the Spirit. Many Christians have moved beyond the idea of a God who is distant and holds the world to account like some superhuman. God is love, and through the bonds of that love we are held and yet our own actions and those of others can lead us to imagine ourselves separate, this is an illusion as we cannot be separate, only imagine it.

Look again at you version of Psalm 23 and compare it to the quantum version below.

Psalms for a quantum world – Psalm 23

I am a part of creation,
the source of all being guides my path,
I am never alone.
In creation I find fulfilment,
places of reflection, inspiration and restoration;
hill and vale, sea and stream,
the stars and the depths,
when I am aware of my connectedness
I cannot get lost.
Even in the depths I am never alone
and need not fear,
for love surrounds me and holds me.
Everything I need and more
is provided by creation,
only my actions and those of others
can withhold what I need.
In oneness there is only love,
a giving from others;
I am always connected,
my whole life and beyond is part of creation.
I am always with the source of all being,
the eternal essence of creation.
I am one with all there is.

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Reflection 2 (Acts)

Most times when you look out of a window you have a choice, you can focus on the things in the distance, the bigger picture, or on the things immediately outside the window, the birds in the garden or the flowers in a window box, the fine detail if you like. The author of Luke and Acts has a

wonderful ability to switch between these two in the space of a few verses. Most of early Acts features the mission of the disciples we know of from Luke, and focuses a lot on Peter, but at the beginning of Chapter nine we suddenly had the intense story of Saul's conversion. Now we are back with Peter and a story of two halves, the metanarrative and the close detail wrapped together in one story.

We find ourselves in the upstairs room of a poor home in Joppa, following the death of an elderly widow. Peter has come at the request of some local disciples, the use of the word a reminder that new disciples are being made all the time. Peter sends everyone out and then in an echo of Jesus raising the Jairus' daughter he quietly calls Dorcas back to life. If this were the only thing we knew about Peter we would know that God was at work in him. Earlier in Acts an event such as this would have been controversial, raising comment and suspicion, now it seems to be accepted, a sign that the work of the disciples is expanding or perhaps in some way a comment on the effect of the conversion of Saul on the atmosphere in the synagogue.

The healing seems part of the metanarrative and yet we are given a lot of small details which point towards something very significant within the bigger picture. Dorcas stands for all the unsung heroes in the church, then and now. We would probably never have heard of her if it had not been for Peter's part in her story for she lives quietly but deeply using her gifts and skills to serve others in need within the community. The world is filled with people like Dorcas and they form the heart of God's church. We are also told that Dorcas is a widow, ad part of a group of widows in the town. In Acts 6 we are told that widows are beginning to form an important group within the life of the church.

Grief stays with you, but it does not have to paralyse. I have seen the effects of grief that consumes and throws life out of focus, but here we witness the loving support of friends in the same position enabling them to work together making a difference in the community. Stitching and sewing were important gifts at a time when all clothing was made by hand, and this group were recognised for their skills. It is also a reminder that there is no time limit on our call to use our gifts for the benefit of others.

It is often the case that the world overlooks what it judges as ordinary but to God every person is special and their gifts are important in the bigger picture of community and journey.

Story Your special gift by Max Lucado

Watch [here](#)

What are your special gifts and how are you using them to build the kingdom?

Suggested hymns

Praise to the Lord, the almighty

Let all God's people join as one

The King of love my shepherd is

The church is wherever

Sing one and all a song of celebration