

Sunday 24th March 2024

All material © Heather Whyte unless stated otherwise.

God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Today is Palm Sunday and we begin by reading the story of Jesus entry into Jerusalem.

Reading Mark 11:1-11

Matthew 11.25,26 + 18.1-5

Jesus said, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to infants...."

At another time the disciples came to him and said, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, who he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

Introduction

I wonder what the children in the crowd thought about what was happening? Festival time was filled with celebrations but even so this arrival in Jerusalem was somewhat different and the crowds laying coats and straw in front of the donkey must have caught the attention of the children, maybe they even joined in. I have this feeling that many adults in the crowd had no perception of why this was happening, they were caught up in the moment perhaps following the lead of the disciples, so what would they answer when the children asked why about it? This morning, as we approach Holy Week, we are going to take some time out and reflect on what those words from Matthew might mean through reflection and music.

I was thirteen when the Beatles released their Sargeant Pepper album which included the track 'When I'm 64'. 64 seemed a lifetime away and now it is yesterday. In years I have grown older, in my spiritual life I have grown deeper and yet I like to think I still approach life with the eyes and enthusiasm of a child.

Jesus did not reach 64, or anywhere near and that was not just about different life expectations at the time. Jesus was seen as radical, and challenged the status quo, he turned things on their head and the authorities felt threatened. Their reaction was all too familiar. Holy week charts the worst humanity can do to humanity and yet it is also about the best humanity can be for that is the message of Jesus and our reading points to the heart of things, approach life with the openness, wonder and the trust of children.

Imagine Adam and Eve as children, imagine them playing with God in the garden. From this starting point let's explore some possibilities and ideas inspired by three Trevor Dennis stories. You might like to have a pencil and paper to 'play' on, jotting down thoughts to come back to, or sketching a simple picture of something that catches your attention.

Music and reflection

[Mike Oldfield – In the beginning \(songs of distant planets\)](#)

Reflection Inspired by God's delight, Imagining God SPCK 1997

Imagine the process of creating something new, the tests and failures, the success and celebrations. Then imagine creating a whole new planet and all its life forms. Imagine a child creating a picture or a model in dough, or a Lego construction without a plan other than an idea in the child's head. It would be a very different process from the approach of an adult, their would be less inhibition, more acceptance and more wonder and excitement. How do you imagine God created the earth?

Let us imagine God creating with the enthusiasm, wonder and excitement of a child, God laughing at the failures and working perhaps with energy angels who laugh and play along, sometimes the victims of the consequences of creation but always enjoying themselves as they experience new animals and new plants. A riot of a time.

Eventually God realised that as much fun as the angels were there was something missing and so God set about creating humanity, one by one with all the love, care and intensity of a child. God showed his first humans to the angels and they were amazed and delighted, and celebrated God having made creatures of the earth with whom to play and share.

Sadly the angel's enthusiasm was misplaced for humans grew and spread and as they did so they forgot about their origins and the essence of joy, wonder and play of the angels, and God. They forgot this is God's earth and they forgot to love it and each other, instead they became users and takers. Until one day, when a son of God tried to remind them, told stories of love and wonder and freedom but instead of listening they felt threatened and they killed the man and the angels cried, and earth wailed and the heavens grew dark.

But that is not the end of the story for after three days God danced again, and in the dance the story reached out to humans, and those who heard responded joining God in the dance of love and delight. In this dance we remember what we always knew, this is God's earth and we are made to share in the angel's fun and delight.

[Iona – A million stars \(Open Sky\)](#)

Reflection Inspired by God's Play, The Three Faces of Christ, Triangle (SPCK) 1999
We know the story, two trees and a choice, temptation and regret. Regret that was soon forgotten, so it seemed, as humanity grew, up and away, forgetting all the fun, and the garden of Eden became empty of laughter and what did God do? God roamed the earth remembering and hoping that one day humanity would remember. The rest of creation never forgot and wherever God paused the animals, the fish, the birds would sense God and invite him to play and what fun would be had, running and splashing, flying and swooping, pure freedom.

In towns and cities people hurried about eyes down, never pausing long enough to wonder at the lightness of the air that would bring a smile to the faces of those aware. Not all humanity had forgotten and when God paused at the edge of a playground children would sense God's presence and invite him to play. They would teach him their games and he would fill their minds with the games of the animals, the fish and the birds, invite them to imagine and wonder and experience the freedom of the stars. When the children became tired and knew playtime was over they would invite God into their school, explaining their joy and wonder at the new school hall and God went with them, for God always accepts invitations. It is true, that whenever we stop long enough to sense God we cannot help but be filled with wonder. God's home is at the heart of wonder, the heart of play and the heart of freely given love, we simply have to remember that.,

Reflection inspired by God's music, The Three Faces of Christ, Triangle (SPCK) 1999
Young children know, they know God, they love God and they speak with God, they have not yet been taught fear and doubt. They know about play and that God likes to play, they feel God within them, a soft, comfortable, loving feeling. It is instinctive and there is nothing better.

Children grow up and adults teach them about fear, and explain it is more complicated. The church teaches them about guilt, confession and respect, and that we have to be polite to God. Where once there was the silence of wonder now every moment has to be filled with words, and God becomes more and more distant, far too far away to kiss as once they did. Adults gave God a capital pronoun and ignored His comfortable slippers and placed Him out of reach.

Children learn it is not correct to like God, we are to love God but it was a love underpinned with fear. However, beneath all that are the memories, the moments of shared play and the laughter of freedom and at the edge of her mind there was a longing to remember fully, that sense of something precious just out of reach.

Imagine yourself there in that child and now imagine yourself packing your bags and turning back, back towards the wonder and freedom, leaving behind the terrifying certainties, the sense of this is all there is, the self-centred belief that we know everything, and worse still own everything. Others mock, and jeer, tell you there is no future that way but you keep going and with every step you try to let go of the fear of God that you have been taught. With every step new challenges arise, loneliness and the unknown but also with every step the sense of exhilaration grows.

As you walk, you realise you are not alone, although there are still some traveling in the other direction you are aware now of others going in the same direction. You become aware that some are carrying musical instruments of all shapes and sizes and someone is even pushing a piano. Someone asks you if you play anything and when you say you don't think so he gives you a tuba. The doubts and questions tumble back but with it is the encouragement to simply try, to trust and try and so you do and the most amazing rude noise comes from the tuba and you cannot help but laugh, and all around people join in your laughter. Then the doubt, you cannot play properly, but those around are more confident, you will they say. As you walk you talk, freely without inhibition, the talk of children, why haven't some people got instruments you ask, and they explain their voice is their instrument, they are the choir; why are some carrying bigger instruments, they have more to overcome you are told and you begin to believe maybe you haven't forgotten as much as you feared.

At the brow of a hill everyone suddenly stops and looks down to the plain below where in the very middle is a figure with a saxophone and instinctively you know that this is God, the God of your childhood, and as you wonder God begins to play. The air is filled with a sound that is soft and inviting, lilting and ethereal as if weaving together earth and heaven. All around people lift their instruments and join in as they begin the descent to the plain. By the time you get there the music is something wonderful, joyous and playful, improvised and yet meant all at the same time. The music begins to slow and fade as one by one instruments are put down and everyone waits – then God lays down her saxophone and begins to dance and every one joins in. You are home and at peace, you are one with God and with all the others and there is nowhere else you want to be.

[Sax moods – I will always love you](#)

Sit quietly for a moment, write or draw on your paper, how do you feel?

Poem - The garden
In the beginning there was a garden.
It was beautiful,
with every colour of the rainbow
and all the colours in between.
There were plants you would recognise
and plants you would wonder at,
and here is the magical bit,
not a weed in sight.
Paradise!

The gardener,
a man of all ages and none,
had created the garden from scratch.

Crafted it with infinite care
and much hard work,
and you might think
the garden would be precious,
but no!

This was a garden for sharing,
for running and laughing,
for smelling and touching,
no keep off signs,
well only one!

Right in the middle of the garden
were two trees,
unlike any trees you might imagine.
These were special trees,
the trees of yes and no,
life and knowledge!

The story is told of a wrong decision,
of regret and heartache,
of loss and worse still abandonment.
Of leaving that wonderful garden,
but, and here is another magical thing,
the gates never closed
and in the middle of the jungle we call the world,
you can still find a path
that leads back to
paradise.

For God did not abandon us,
we abandoned God,
and he waits to welcome us back
when we are ready.
Not only that
he sent a guide to show the way,
the way that leads through death
and back to paradise;
and because we believe
Jesus has been there before us
we believe it is true,
and so we follow;
and death is nothing more
than the gateway to something wonderful.
And, if we listen with our hearts,
we will feel the laughter
in the garden God made.

© Heather Whyte

Today is Palm Sunday and in churches as a symbol of that people are often given a palm cross, representative of the palms we read were laid before Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. A cross, symbol of a crossroads, our journeys, spiritual and travelling often take us to crossroads and the choice of which way to go. Perhaps it is time to start travelling backwards as well as forwards, to let go of our adult ways of looking at things and explore

things from a more childlike perspective. I invite you to us this week to reflect upon how a child would perceive the events.

Prayer - Through the eyes of a child.

Eternal God, we pray for change,
we pray for your Kingdom to come, but are we ready?
Are we ready for the topsy-turvy world of your Kingdom?
Are we ready to look at the world, the church and ourselves
through the eyes of a child?
Would we like what we see?

Little children are-
 out in the open air, feet bare, not a care,
 accepting a dare, laughing at the fair,
 experimenting with hair,
 building a lair, riding a mare, eating a pear,
 wanting to share, not worried what they wear.

You call us to receive the Kingdom as little children
 vulnerable, trusting,
 dependant, growing,
 learning,
but we prefer independence, distrust others and fear vulnerability.
We think we have grown up and know all the answers
but in your terms we are still babies.

Children find ways to communicate,
 we build barriers;
children look for common ground,
 we make the most of our differences.

Eternal God, help us to grow more childlike,
ready to change,
open to learning new ways.
Help us to recognise when our view is distorted by our experience,
when we are making life too complicated,
when we are relying on ourselves and not you.
Give us the courage to see the world, the church and ourselves
through the eyes of a child,
and the strength to act upon what we see. Amen