

Sermon for Sunday 20 February 2022

The Second Sunday before Lent

Genesis 2: 4b – 9, 15 – end; Revelation 4; Luke 8: 22 – 25

Where is your faith?

How appropriate it feels, after the storms of last week that we should have a storm in today's Gospel reading. But I want to start somewhere else – with thinking about - What is it like to be in the presence of God? Our three readings today give us three different, but not contradictory glimpses of an answer to that question.

Our reading from Genesis is taken from the second account of creation. Yes, there are two accounts of creation in Genesis! God creates the first human being, Adam, from the dust of the ground. Then He makes a garden in Eden and puts the man there with an abundance of trees that are beautiful and with fruits that are good to eat. And with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then he

realises that the man might be lonely on his own, so he makes all the animals and invites Adam to give them their names. But none of them seem to be quite right as a helper for Adam. So in the end God creates woman from one of Adam's ribs. To his great delight. It's a charming story, as God and the man almost playfully work together, God bringing into being and Adam naming the animals. There's no sense of any distance between God and His creation. There is a command from God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – which was omitted from our reading. But no command that God is to be worshipped. Rather an easy intimacy between God and Adam. To be in the presence of God before the Fall it seems is just a natural part of the way things are.

Moving on to our second reading, from the Book of Revelation - we have a picture of what it is like to be in the presence of God in heaven. John, the writer of Revelation, is taken up into heaven. Here God is enthroned, and around his throne are twenty-four more thrones with

seated heavenly beings and four strange winged creatures constantly singing God's praises. Every time they sing God's praises, the twenty-four heavenly beings fall down, cast their crowns before God's throne and worship. To be in God's presence in the book of Revelation is to fall before Him in worship and adoration, acknowledging Him as the absolute power and authority, the king above all kings. Quite a contrast with the simple and easy bond between God and Adam in our first reading.

By contrast again, our third reading – in just four brief verses – brings us into a world which is very recognisably the world we live in now. It is still fairly early in Jesus' ministry, before he has sent out the twelve to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Before Peter has made his declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the Holy One of God. Jesus and his disciples get into a boat on Lake Galilee. Jesus is exhausted and falls asleep. Meanwhile a storm blows up. Even this doesn't wake Jesus, so the disciples wake Him in panic and fear, 'Master, Master we are perishing!' It's not clear what they expect

Him to do. But He calms the storm by rebuking the wind and the waves. And then He asks them. 'Where is your faith?' This does not reassure them – rather the reverse – it increases their fear. And they ask themselves, 'Who then is this, who can command even the winds and the water – and they obey Him?'

My biggest worry during the recent storms has been where will the next large branch off our churchyard trees fall? And I spent some time on Friday wondering if it was sensible to go out and keep appointments. Nothing like as life-threatening as being in a small boat in very choppy waters. But sometimes, as our first hymn reminded us, other things in life can make us feel out of control and helpless. I'm sure you can think of your own examples.

In Jesus, God breaks into our world, the world of everyday reality – of fishing, and transport, and storms and squalls of all kinds. In our Gospel today the disciples are beginning to grasp this. But the dawning realisation of His power just makes them afraid in a different way. As the

letter to the Hebrews reminds us “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10: 31). But they held on, they witnessed more miracles, and soon Jesus sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal in His name.

As Jesus’ companions were fast learning life as a disciple of Jesus, life in the presence of God, is not necessarily cosy and easy. ‘Where is your faith?’ says Jesus.

It’s been said that faith is like a song that disappears when we stop singing. Faith is not a possession that we can hang on to and keep safe, but an activity. The more we step out in trust, the more our faith grows. Just as a muscle grows stronger as we use it. This was the experience of the disciples.

We heard something from Carrie, the curate at St Botolph’s last Sunday about her life story, her journey of trust in Jesus and following His calling, and some of the unexpected places that God has led her to.

For us too, to be in the presence of God, to choose to get in the boat with Jesus can sometimes be something of a white knuckle ride.

In all circumstances, even the most difficult we always have a choice – to believe and trust our heavenly Father, to stretch out towards the hand of Jesus, and to trust that He is there, even in the darkness, or to shut down, to turn away and allow our faith to diminish.

When the going got hard and Jesus asked the twelve disciples if they wanted to leave him, Peter replied, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life?” (John 6: 68)

Amen