

Take your Place

Pentecost 17 2024 , St. Andrew's Kelowna
Proverbs 1:20-33; Ps 19; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38

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May the words of my mouth and meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Here we are in mid September already settling back into the routines or habits of the fall be that school, teaching, work, helping with grandchildren or activities resuming after the summer. The familiar rhythms we left behind just a few months ago are up and and running again. In our worship life we return to Proulx's Community Mass which is one of our familiar music routines. And as I returned to the familiar rhythm of work this week, I had a surprise visit from a neighbour here in the Mission who is writing a book on climate change wanting to know what the churches have to say. As Anglicans who make a baptismal vow to safeguard the integrity of creation, who observe a Season of Creation, as St. Andrew's who farms organically, well he soon - much to his surprise- discovered he was preaching to the environmental sustainability choir. When he asked what I thought was at the root of it all, I said it is ultimately a question of who we are. The impact of the Enlightenment, the idolization of the economy (among many other things) on our Western sense of self, and indeed on our theology, created and perpetuates a deep separation of humanity from the natural world turning creation into resources to be used rather than partners in the vocation to which God calls all that God has created.

Our psalm this morning calls us into a world, better yet returns us to our world, where the vocation of all creation is to communicate the glory of God:

“ The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament his handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, there are no words; their voice is not heard;

yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

Creation is communicating the glory of God beautifully and seamlessly: this is what the world is created to do. God's first communication in scripture brings creation into being showing us that the heart of all life is the outpouring of God's self and love. Creation's purpose is to echo this outpouring and love, God's glory, back to God. Our deep alienation from creation, and indeed our abuse of it, stems from a deep alienation from own ourselves, from our purpose, as creatures created in the image of God who are called to echo God's own glory back to God, as part of the great symphony of praise of all creation. The fear of the Lord, or the respect, or the reverence of the God who pours out God's life in creation is the beginning of wisdom. The psalmist ends psalm 19 asking that that their words might be acceptable in the sight of the Creator of the world, that all thoughts and desires of their heart resonate with that same glory that the whole creation proclaims.

The letter of James has a lot to say about the power of words, or the tongue, which follows on writings in Jewish Wisdom Literature such as Sirach and Proverbs. Of particular note today is how we can live with chasms between what we say and how we act: with the tongue “we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.”. If anyone watched

the presidential debate this week there was notable rhetoric that did just this. Like a rudder steers a whole ship so can the words we choose and the narratives we weave steer our thinking and assumptions, our vision and our actions, and that of those around us. Those given the privilege of any kind of teaching, any kind of forming of other people, need be very aware of the responsibility of this work.

The respect of the God who pours out God's life in creation is the beginning of wisdom. And this wisdom comes to fullness in person of Christ, God's Word made flesh, where God's perfect communication and action come together in human form. And so our Gospel this morning offers Jesus asking the question: "Who do you say that I am?". This question comes "on the way", on the journey to Caesarea Philippi and on the journey to understanding. We are right there on the way with them as Peter discovers the dissonance between his own words and actions, between his thinking and God's thinking. In the first century there were a variety of ideas about God's Messiah: a warrior king, a restorer of justice, a restorer of Israel. Perhaps one of these was Peter's own but whatever he pictured it was not who Jesus actually is. Just as the heart of creation is God's own outpouring of life and love so the heart of the new creation is Christ's own outpouring of life and love. And in the Empire in which they live, this means Jesus the Messiah will suffer, be rejected, killed, die and will rise again. The Greek used in Jesus' reprimand of Peter is the same used when Jesus called his disciples along the lakeshore. Even Jesus' reprimand is an invitation into the Divine Life, into discipleship: 'Get behind me, get back into the place where you can see and follow. Follow me: let your thinking and speaking and actions come together in wholeness by allowing the pattern of my life, my dying and rising, to become your own. Take up your cross and follow me.'

Take up your cross: take your place in this wisdom present since the beginning, given a human face and voice in Jesus the Christ. Take your place in this mystery, in Christ's own love and mercy, in his Kingdom-clarity, in his work of new creation. This call comes to us as we enter the familiar routines of our lives to remind us that it is just these very things that the Spirit will use to co-create God's new creation with you, in only the way your unique life can. And this call comes to us as we welcome the Gray Family and Adam and Anna who are preparing for baptism where they will choose this wisdom, this pattern, and take their place in love, mystery and body of Christ. This call comes to us in the Season of Creation so that we might all relearn our place partners with the natural world called to echo God's own glory back to God, as part of the great symphony of praise of all creation.

Amen.

The Rev'd Anne Privett