

The Pro-Cathedral of Holy Trinity Brussels

10.30 February 15th 2009

‘Creation’

Proverbs 8:1, 22-31; Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:1-14

It is a very poignant moment; for many a painful; a confusing moment
For others it can be a moment of healing; of resolution; of letting go; of beginning again.

It is the moment in the funeral service when a handful of soil is scattered over the coffin and the words are said: *We now commit his body to the ground **ashes to ashes, dust to dust***
Earlier in the service we hear the words: *Our days are like the grass; we flourish like a flower of the field; when the wind goes over it, it is gone and its place will know it no more.*

Every human being – everyone of us here - is intimately connected to the earth – we are a very part of creation - not separate from it.

As Christians we can often be schizophrenic about the creation we are so much a part
We find on Jesus lips the words ‘*God so loved the **world***’. And yet in the Baptism service we have been asked...*Do you reject sin, the **world** and the devil?*

For much of Christian history men and women have sought to separate themselves from the earth – an earth that we think of as dusty or dirty or unclean. In western culture we sit on chairs up from the ground, separating ourselves from the earth and the dirt– and yet when we look east we see that people are equally comfortable, equally clean sitting very close to the ground – close to the earth.

From an earlier sermon I know that many of you are good with proverbs. So I wonder if you can help me with a particular Victorian proverb.....It begins....

Cleanliness is..... next..... to..... Godliness

Victorians had a obsession with cleanliness – with separating themselves from the earth – with beating out every speck of dirt and soil – cleanliness was a sign of progress and civilisation.

It was a sign of separation from an uncivilised, pagan and unclean world. Cleanliness is next to Godliness – a powerful Victorian proverb...

And yet our reading from proverbs 8 tells us that the wisdom of God is closely connected with the creation of the world. That the wisdom of God was filled with rejoicing at the unfolding of the creation. A God who is not separate from his creation – but intimately involved from the very beginning.

I wonder how many of us were born in Belgium?

Many of us are along way from the land where we were born – Previous generations would have seen themselves as closely connected with the land of their birth, the land of their forefathers – many would have understood that their very beings were crafted from the dust of the earth and that the land was their birthright. They would have well understood that their own well-being was closely connected with their land and connected with the well-being of their land. And whilst you and I may be along way from the land of our birth there are still parts of the world today where the people still see themselves and their land as intimately connected.

In our readings from both John's Gospel and the book of Colossians we see that Jesus is intimately connected with the Creation. That his birth and the earth belong together in the same breadth.

Colossians 1: 15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation.*

That he is the very part of God who created all things v16

That he holds all things together v 17

And if that wasn't enough - in verse 19 we find these words...

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him

The God who is Trinity – the God who is creator was pleased to fully experience living as a human – to live, to breathe, to laugh, to cry...

To walk – even to write in the dust

That he was pleased to be fully part of the very creation he had created.

As John puts in verse 14

The Word became flesh and lived among us for a while. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth

Jesus did not only come to experience the creation – nor did he come just to show us what God is like...both of which are powerfully true...

But he also came to reconcile a fallen creation to himself Verses Colossians 1:19 and 20

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

If Victorians were obsessed with Cleanliness being next to Godliness the people of the 20th century went dangerously further.

The story of the 20th century is one of the human race trying to master the creation.

In the 20th century we dammed rivers, emptied seas, developed nuclear power and genetically modified crops...we created homes and cars and shopping malls with central heating where we can have summer temperatures all year long – we invented air conditioning, refrigeration and irradiation...and we transport food from all parts of the world so that we can have summer food in winter and winter food in summer. In hot countries we have even indoor ski-slopes with real snow.

As we have sought to master the creation we have excluded the Creator. As we gained mastery of the world – we lost intimacy with the Created and we lost intimacy with the Creator.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness has been replaced with Control of the World is next to being God or Control of the World is next to Godlessness.

Our attempt to control of the world has been foolish and very temporary – working the world against its divine design has put us all in danger – working against its divinely given rhythms means that the earths climate is collapsing.

In the world of the EU Institutions 2009 will be a key year when it comes to Climate Change. Just before next Christmas there will be a mad scramble to agree a United Nations Climate Change deal that will be just good enough to save the planet... And when the governments have finished their dealing and when they put their climate change policies into place they will turn to their citizens - to you and me to change their lifestyles from high carbon consumption to near no carbon consumption. Within the next thirty years there will be a 'second industrial revolution' 'green revolution' or climatic catastrophe.

For some the expected green revolution will be exciting...for many it will be painful as we have to let go of the ways of the 20th century – for those whose lives have become totally out of step with the creation and its Creator the transition will be hardest of all – for those who have longed to live lives in a natural rhythm in touch in the God the 'green revolution' may – just may - begin to feel like coming home.

But what about you and me. Our readings today remind us that God is intimately involved with his Creation – and that we are such a part of that creation that God chose to come and dwell among us in order that we might be reconciled – that we and all creation might be at home with him. And if you have not yet read the Shack – I can thoroughly recommend it – it is a powerful contemporary novel - it might give you a completely fresh understanding of what it means to be at home with the Creator.

When I think about my life – how closely am I connected with the natural rhythms of the world? Do days, even weeks go by without me looking at the sky or touching a leaf or a blade of grass? When was the last time I allowed some soil, or ash or dust to fall through my fingers?

There are so many days that I am so focussed on what I am doing that when I get home I can't answer the question 'What was the weather like today in Brussels?'

There are so many days I that I am so focussed on what I am doing that I know that I have been out of touch with the Creator.

For you and me there is no need to wait for the next round of climate change policies from the EU. Each of us needs to check out how our lifestyles disconnect us from and impact on the creation...and each of needs to check out just how in touch we are with the Creator.

Today you might go to the prayer rail to ask the Creator to give you a fresh start.

Today you can make time to be with God

Tomorrow walk to work or get off the tram a stop early

Tomorrow don't buy that new item you don't need

This week make time to look at the sky or the trees you pass by every day

Next month you might recognised just how much you have changed.

And so to end a quote from Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Earth's crammed with heaven

And every common bush afire with God

But only he who sees takes off his shoes

The rest sit round and pluck blackberries

AMEN

Revd. Gary Wilton