

2nd Sunday before Lent - 12th February 2023

Genesis 1:1-2.3 and Matthew 6: 25-end.

Mother Emma

The Second Sunday before Lent is, as you may have guessed from our first reading(!), known as Creation Sunday. We are reminded today of the joy and beauty of God's Creation, immediately before Lent, Holy Week and Easter when we reflect in penitence on the ways in which humanity has failed to act as good stewards of God's world, and look ahead to Christ's redemption of us and of the world in spite of all our weakness.

This year, in the midst of the destruction and loss caused by the earthquake in Turkey, or by the catastrophic effect of weapons of war across the world, there is the potential to sound trite and uncaring if we interpret Jesus' teaching in our Gospel as simply encouraging those who have lost homes, livelihoods and loved ones, to concentrate on behaving like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

In fact, the question we might be asking ourselves, is to what extent the violence wrought on the earth, here and across the world, is in fact due, not to God's original good plan for creation, but to our poor stewardship. Have we adequately enabled all people to be equally protected from natural disaster, or are we abandoning some to much greater risk than others? Is much of the suffering of others around the world due to conflict or the effects of climate change?

God gave to humankind dominion over everything on the earth; he created enough of everything to feed and sustain his creatures, provided they were rightly distributed, and yet throughout the centuries, humankind has been responsible for so much loss and hardship through its wasteful, greedy and hostile use of the world's abundant resources.

The message of Jesus' teaching about the birds and the flowers is perhaps not that we should turn away from the loss and tragedy which stems from the destruction of those places which should provide love and security, but rather that we should be constantly aware of God's gifts to us in creation and use them in a way which allows others to do the same. We can appreciate the beauty, the intricacy, the splendour and the abundance of what we see in Nature around us, not as resources to be seized and amassed, but as generous provision by God for the needs of the whole world.

One of the decisions taken this year in the PCC has been to sign up for "Eco-Church". This is an award scheme which encourages churches to share in their

vision of caring for creation as an integral part of loving their neighbours and following God faithfully. We are exhorted to look carefully at the decisions and choices we make in caring for our church, its buildings, investments, land and people, and see whether these will enhance and preserve the earth which God declared to be “very good”.

It is easy for the Church to appear to be “jumping on the bandwagon” of green issues, or of simple, minimalist lifestyles, but in fact although there have been many examples of greed and excess within the history of the Church, there have also been many touching examples of those who lived simply and lightly on the earth, centring their love on God, and sharing what they had with others.

Many people today are very drawn to the image of St Francis, not simply because of his love of animals, but because of his simplicity, his decision to give up a rich and luxurious lifestyle to live frugally and gently with nature. The so-called Celtic saints of Ireland based their spirituality around thanksgiving for every one of God’s gifts they experienced, from the cow to the milking-pail, and every element of their daily lives. Perhaps this habit of seeing God in every tiny detail of our existence is the key to our appreciation of Creation, and to stirring up in us a desire to be better stewards of its beauties and its essential goodness.

Today we shall be baptising Fatima, who has reached this point of decision after a long and thoughtful journey. As we welcome her into our fellowship, we shall hear her promise to follow Christ and to love her neighbour as herself, and we shall be reminded of our own baptismal vows to give thanks for God’s love and for all he has given us. Medieval baptismal fonts were often built in the shape of an octagon, representing the seven days of Creation, followed by the Eighth Day which followed the Resurrection. It also hinted at the image of an eighth day which began when someone was baptised and began a new life with God in Christ. We have heard this morning that at the end of the seven days, God rested and saw that his creation was good.

Let us pray that our own new baptismal lives will help us to care for God’s people, and, as a part of that, for this beautiful earth he has given us in which to love, to grow and to thrive. Amen