

Bible Sunday 2022, Eucharist

Isaiah 45:22-end, Romans 15:1-6, Luke 4:16-24

Father Christopher

'For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.'

In the name of the Father...

'Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.'

How are we to fit these two passages together?

Having hope for the future, and not yet giving tomorrow any thought.

There is in Christianity, and perhaps in all faiths, something of a tension, or paradox even, between on the one hand having hope in something bigger than the present moment, in holding fast for the long-term; and, on the other hand, giving all our attention to the here and now – to the place and time in which we find ourselves.

There is also something of a tension I think, or I may just be speaking about myself here, between what might seem a romantic and even naïve view that '*all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well*' as Julian of Norwich put it; and a world-weary cynicism that '*there is nothing new under the sun.*'

I admit to having held all of these positions over the course of the last week or so.

On the one hand thinking, 'How on earth can things possibly get any worse?' And on the other: 'Politicians come and go; we will get on with our lives, and very little in our day-to-day existence will actually change.'

Both of these positions are perfectly justifiable, contradictory as they may seem, though I know that for many their lives *will* become far harder, as the balance tips towards not being able to feed their children or themselves; and many have not yet dared put the heating on this year.

And I think the reason why they do actually, weirdly, fit together, is because giving attention to the present, while also holding onto a sense of our place in the history of our country, our species, our world, gives us that thing we call perspective; something often notably lacking from our politics.

Perspective is a quality which artists found it notoriously difficult to achieve. Not just how to have a vanishing point in a picture, as things move from being bigger near to us to smaller further away.

But also how to achieve the *transition* from foreground to background – something which is hard because the human eye normally only focusses on one or the other, and so when we see both in a painting we are seeing something which the human eye cannot actually naturally see all at once. Rubens was a notable master of this, though he would do it through trickery, perhaps a branch or a wagon or a field boundary cutting across the transition between near and far.

In our faith however, if not in our sight, we should be able to see both what is near to us - the world we inhabit - and the far, in the lives of others now and throughout time. And fundamentally, to understand the relationship between the two: in other words, how we *fit*.

And our scriptures are crucial to that perspective, because it is only through our scripture that we remember our place as the latest custodians of what has been handed on to us.

Each generation does of course bring its own fresh perspective, but the minute that becomes divorced from what has been handed on to us we are doomed.

We do not just turn to scripture for instruction, as some think, as though it were a massive rule book, but we read it for inspiration – to hear the stories of men and women of great virtue; to hear warnings of hubris and pride, often in the very same people.

We turn to it for poetry of sublime beauty: '*set me as a seal upon your heart; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave.*'

And not just for its own sake, but to tap into the relationship our forebears thousands of years ago also had with God.

We know the person of Jesus, and the story of His life, death and resurrection, through our scripture.

We learn how to pray from our scriptures, and we pray with them. They form the heart of our liturgy, the actions and words which bring us together as the People of God, His Church here in this place and throughout the world and time.

Scripture is not just something we studied at school and remember with a shudder - it is what we inhabit as we live out our faith. It is what connects us to one another, and it is where we find that what we might have suspected was unique to our thoughts and experience is in fact part of our common humanity over millennia.

And in knowing that our life, our experience, is set in the context, in the *perspective*, of all that has gone before, and all that is to come, we as Christians do not despair because instead of being the centre of our world we discover that we are merely one of many billions over the course of eternity.

Instead we rejoice because we know that we too were loved into being as the first man and woman were in the beginning; that whatever our faults, others have gone before, and the world has carried on; and that after we are gone and forgotten those we leave behind will continue to love, hurt, make our mistakes and yet live to hope. And in the last day we will all be transformed in the love of the God who created us and sustains us.

As we look on at the vanity and folly of those in power, it is right that we take it seriously – that we pray for a restoration of stability; that, in the words of the Prayer Book, we might be '*godly and quietly governed.*'

And that we strain every sinew to care for those most seriously affected by the vicissitudes of this world.

But it is also right that we should not despair. That we should know that every human folly has already been seen, and will be again.

That as Christians, in the wisdom of the human experience and the revelation of God which we find in our holy texts, we know our place in this world as well as in eternity. And that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

'And all shall be well; and all shall be well; and all manner of things shall be well.'

Amen