

**A sermon preached at St Andrew's Church Soham on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent 2018. Prov. 8:1, 22-31; Jn. 1: 1-14**

*May I speak and may we hear in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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What you see – they say – depends on where you stand.

Here are two different perspectives – two different views – of creation.

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The first view is an actual view –

a view from someone who stood somewhere we're highly unlikely ever to stand.

It's the view of the late Edgar Allan Mitchell, the astronaut -

the view he had from the moon.

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Mitchell described his Apollo 14 space mission

as 'akin to a religious experience'.

This is how he described planet earth- how he saw it from the moon:

'It was a beautiful, harmonious, peaceful-looking planet – blue, with white clouds, and one that gave you a deep sense of home, of being, of identity.'

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That's one view –

creation as beautiful,

creation as harmonious,

creations as somewhere and something with which we are one –

something of which we are part.

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That's the astronaut's view.

Now for a playwright's.

This is a story told in one of Samuel Beckett's plays:

A man goes into a tailor's shop –

he needs a new pair of trousers

'How long will it take you to make them?' he asks the tailor

'Come back in a month,' the tailor says –

so off the man goes.

One month later, the man comes back – 'I'm here to pick up my trousers'

'So sorry,' says the tailor. 'Give me another month – I'm having trouble with the fly.'

'Fair enough,' thinks the man – can't have a dodgy fly – so off he goes again.

Another month goes by – and the man comes back.

'So sorry,' says the tailor. 'I need another month – I've not quite finished the waist band.'

'OK. If I have to,' says the man. 'I'll give him another month'. And off he goes again.

Well the man gets caught up with work,

and it's not til four months later that he finally goes back.

He enters the shop – the tailor looks away.

The man – suddenly – loses his cool. He shakes his fist at the tailor:

'For crying out loud, man! For crying out loud!

You call yourself a tailor?!

In 6 days, do you hear me – in 6 days God made the world – and you can't make me a pair of trousers in 6 months!'

The tailor steps back. He looks at the man calmly.

He reaches under the counter and he pulls out a package.

He slowly unwraps it, and he lays out the contents before the customer. Then he speaks:

'My dear sir, my dear, *look* at the state of the world...

*And look at my trousers.'*

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So – two views –

A view of creation in harmony,

and a view of creation in a state.

I wonder which view we resonate with most.

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Our Bible readings today

mirror to some extent

those two views.

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In the reading from Proverbs – the reading Jan read to us –

words written around 500BC–

Creation is presented as perfect.

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God the Creator brings forth Wisdom –

it's Wisdom who's speaking in this section of Proverbs.

Wisdom marvels at God's work of creation.

Wisdom, she says, is 'beside; God always:

'rejoicing in God's inhabited world, delighting in the human race.'

This is a perfect universe.

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Fast forward 600 years,

and we come to today's Gospel reading.

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John gives us a more nuanced perspective.

The Word, like Wisdom, is with God in the beginning.

Through that same Word,

all things come into being.

'Without him was not anything made that was made'.

John writes of light.

He also writes of darkness.

Darkness present in the beginning.

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John harks back to another beginning.

He harks back to The Beginning

The beginning described in the book of Genesis.

The beginning when darkness covered the face of the deep

The beginning when God said 'let there be light'.

John's Gospel and Genesis both begin with the phrase: 'In the beginning'

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In John's Gospel – as in Genesis -

Darkness and light are set in opposition.

They're there together, in the beginning:

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'.

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If we look at our world today

What we see, I'd say,

is a mixture of light and darkness.

We see creation not only subject to some mysterious, primeval darkness –

darkness that was there in the beginning -

We see it marred by the devastation

we human beings have caused.

It's hard to 'delight' in the human race like Wisdom did

when we consider what we have done –

and continue to do - to our world.

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I'm not going to give you or myself a lecture  
on what we might do  
to help restore and respect the integrity of creation:  
I for one know a lot of what ought to do –  
My difficulty lies in doing it.

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The stories of creation in Genesis -  
like the astronaut's vision –  
Set human kind as part of creation,  
not as somehow superior to it or outside it.

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If we are part of something,  
we have a responsibility towards it.

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Saving the planet will take more than the efforts of you and me  
But we're all, I think, called to do something.  
We're called to examine our consciences.  
We're called to remember that what we do as individuals – be it positive or negative -  
has an effect on the wider whole.  
We're called - as Christians - to make changes to the way we live our lives.  
Even small changes will make a difference.

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We're also called - as Christians - to read and to reflect on God's Word –  
God's Word as it comes to us Sunday by Sunday.  
Today, as I reflect on the beginning of John's Gospel, I also reflect on the end.

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All the Gospel writers say  
that after the crucifixion  
Jesus' body was wrapped and placed in a tomb.  
John - and only John - puts in a detail:  
Only John tells us where that tomb was.  
John says the tomb was in a garden.

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A garden appears back in Genesis.  
In Genesis we read about the Garden of Eden.  
The garden God created in the beginning.

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And just in case we've missed the significance of Christ's tomb being in a garden,

John mentions the garden again, a few verses later.

When Mary Magdalene sees the risen Christ,

Mary – in John - supposes him to be the gardener.

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And when the risen Christ sees Mary, he calls her 'woman' -

He uses the word Adam used for Eve

when Adam makes his excuses in Eden, after he's eaten the forbidden fruit:

'The woman gave it to me, and I did eat'.

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But there's a crucial difference

between what happens next

in each of these two stories.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve are banished from the garden:

Adam and Eve are sent out by God.

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In John's Gospel, in the Easter Garden,

Mary too is sent out,

But Mary is sent on a mission –

'Go to my brothers,' says Jesus. 'Tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'

This is a very different sending out – it's not banishment - it's the way to restoration.

Jesus is fulfilling an earlier promise – a promise he made a few chapters earlier in John -

'I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all things to myself'

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Jesus, in his going back to the Father,

will draw together God's broken creation – Jesus will restore it – he will draw it to himself,

and with it he'll restore and raise up fallen humanity.

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But before he does that, Jesus gives humanity a mission -

humanity represented – as it is in Genesis - by a man and a woman.

Jesus speaks 1:1 with Mary and with Peter.

He sends them both out:

'Go tell my brothers'

'Go Feed my sheep'

Share in my work of building God's new creation.

Live and pray and act in my name.

Make a new beginning.

'Follow me'

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'Follow me' in John's Gospel

are words that come not at the beginning –

but at the end.

'Follow me' is the last thing Jesus says in John's Gospel.

It's never too late to make a new start –

It's never too late to begin again –

It's never too late to try to restore what we think might be lost.

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And I'd encourage us to pray with that thought.

I'd encourage us to pray and to think about how we treat the creation that surrounds us -

how we treat God's people, and how we treat God's world.

To pray and to think where we need to make a new start – however small.

A new start for the sake of ourselves and one another,

A new start for the sake of future generations,

A new start for the sake of the whole of creation:

God's glorious creation

of which we humans are part.

**Amen.**

*Eleanor Whalley  
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