

Second Sunday before Lent 2021

Collect: Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth and made us in your own image: teach us to discern your hand in all your works and your likeness in all your children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things, now and for ever. Amen.

Proverbs 8.1, 22–31: Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Gospel; John 1.1–14: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection:

Jesus is at the centre of the Gospels, what he says and does and how he shows people God's love for all. The Gospel writers tell us about Him through the lens of their faith and their cultural expectations of a deliverer and redeemer and from their understanding of how prophets in different ages had thoughtfully considered what this redeemer might be like and what he would do. And the Gospel writers communicate how those who knew Jesus and followed his way, had come to radically re-interpret what had been thought of before which had left them with the new and living hope that they had found in Jesus' life and his death and his being raised from the dead.

Throughout Christian history particular doctrines have influenced thinking and teaching and today we also have a fuller understanding of psychology, of genetics and of human anthropology which means that we know much more about why we are the people we are and how religious faith can help us to grow and to flourish.

Our bible readings today remind us of the Wisdom tradition which helps us understand the way of God that Jesus' life reflected, his abiding in God's love and his living as a child of God. And the Wisdom tradition of Proverbs showing how things are connected in the natural world and how this reveals God's delight in it, including in human lives and relationships. John begins his Gospel with an acknowledgement of this tradition to show that Jesus in his life and teachings has added to our understanding of how the world can be looked at through the eyes of its creator. The creator who is passionate about the splendour, uniqueness and variety of the living world.

John starting with Wisdom and presenting to us the life of Jesus from the perspective of a life that demonstrated this wisdom in human relationships fully inclusive of all and committed to peace and justice, compassion and kindness. And in Jesus he gives to Wisdom a human face who shows people a way in which they can be reconciled to each other and to God. Jesus' life described by John as bringing light shining in and through darkness. John opening up the life of Jesus as giving light to the world.

At the beginning of the play *Under Milk Wood* perhaps Dylan Thomas had the beginning of Genesis and John's Gospel in mind when he wrote the line, "To begin at the beginning." His drama then opens out a day in the life of a community, the small and bigger dramas of the everyday and the influence of the past.

The artist Grayson Perry also takes the everyday of peoples' lives in his portraits *Who Are You?*, in which he tries to show the immediate and longer-term impact of significant life changes on the people who are the subjects of his paintings. His premise is that as people we are changed by particular experiences of life, and that it helps to recognise this as we try to adapt well to the change.

The magnificent West Yorkshire landscapes and farmland have been the backdrop to the television series *Last Tango in Halifax*. Its central characters, who are in their mid-seventies, and having both been widowed, rekindle their relationship of 60 years earlier. This was the central plot of the first series but since then the lives of others have come to the fore, the ups and downs of all human life, a major tragedy and explorations of human sexuality. And a Banksy on a barn wall.

Across the generations, as two families who had no previous connection have come together, through the older couple meeting up again and marrying, we find people across the generations facing issues that they had never before thought about, and moral choices they had not faced. Recognising change, that life experiences do change people, is one way in which they all navigate and adapt and come to a fuller understanding of themselves, more open, more open about living with difference and for the most part having a more generous understanding of others.

The opening of John's Gospel asks if we, like the first followers of Jesus, can similarly be transformed in our understanding and acceptance of ourselves and of others and so also about how we can relate to God. Crucial to this is to think more about God's wisdom embodied in the life of Jesus and in our recognising this wisdom to be found at the heart of everything.

John asking us to begin our consideration of "Jesus: Who Are You?" by finding that he is our protagonist in opening up for us a way into the goodness of God and into the depth and breadth of God's love for all.