

Angela's Ramblings, 2nd before Lent.

Readings for this week. Proverbs 8 v 1, 22-31. Colossians 1v 15-20, John 1 v 1-14.

As we draw closer to Lent, and a time that we often use to reflect on Christ and our Christian faith, the readings remind us of the timelessness of Christ. Jesus's human existence may have begun in a stable in Bethlehem, but as God Jesus is eternal. As in John 1, "In the beginning was the Word "Logos" and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us". This is very much underlined in the Colossians reading which sets out in no uncertain terms the full majesty of Jesus. He was no afterthought or latecomer to the Godhead. Jesus was in the midst of creation from the very beginning, "for through him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible".

Yet neither is the Spirit of God left out, for we see the Spirit referred to as the Wisdom of God. This is referred to as she, as a person, not just as an attribute, a concept, or ethos, but a participant in the work of the Lord. In Proverbs chapter 1 v 20, "Wisdom cries out in the street, in the square and raises her voice". Chapter 8 v1, "Does not wisdom call and does not understanding raise her voice?" V 22, "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work". Surely this can only refer to the Holy Spirit who give voice to the word of God. I have always thought that it is a great pity that, as Christian theology developed, there was a loss of a feminine role within the Godhead and the Trinity, which became a very male concept. Yet in Romans, Paul talks of creation itself as groaning with birth pangs, which can only be experienced by a woman giving birth. Just a thought.

However, there is no doubt as Christians, we think of God as the creator of this wonderful, beautiful, planet in all its complexity, in which we all live. We are finding out new facts all the time of how delicate the balance of nature is and how one part is dependent on another, co-inhabiting the spaces. Yet we also learn of how we, the human species, is destroying the world. We have played fast and loose, as if we can make another planet, or use its resources without consequence. I have always felt ashamed and disappointed that the Church was not the body to raise protest. It took the Genesis view that we as humans have dominion over, rather than are caretakers of the world, that we believe God created. It is very sad that it took bodies like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth to raise such issues as global warming, and the ecological destruction of this planet.

However, we are where we are and thank goodness the Church is now lending a voice to the urgent need for change. Change we must, if we want a world that is inhabitable for generations to come. One of the big issues at the moment is plastic waste. Most of us do our bit by recycling. However, I do sometimes wonder, rather than recycling that plastic bottle or bag, do we need the item in plastic in the first place? There was a time before plastic, which many of us can remember, there was 3d on the glass bottle when you took it back. I used to visit Germany quite often, and to my surprise, even in the supermarket there was money exchanged for the bottle. Though many of us have gone back to a reusable bag, shops are still giving us plastic ones even when we have our own. I was very disappointed when Sainsbury's went from their large paper carriers to plastic bags. I remember when my mother bought her first plastic bowl. She was so proud of it, but its shortcomings came very quickly. At that time people used to starch collars, cuffs, blouses etc., and the usual way was to cook it on the stove in a metal bowl. My mother used her plastic one and you can guess the result: a perfect gas ring shape at the bottom of the bowl, with the starch all under the cooker. My dad and I just stood and laughed.

Yet, as we know, the issue is more than plastic. It is life-style, greed, and wanting so much more. The pandemic has shown us how much foreign travel we do and the damage to the environment it causes. Large cruise ships going into Venice and other small ports and how they damage the ecosystem. Poor countries that have come to rely on the tourist trade, but the infrastructure such as providing water for all is not there. The result is the tourist have their shower, while the indigenous population go without clean water. Because of global warming and the rise of sea levels, we are seeing whole chunks of ice falling into the sea in the Arctic regions, and even our own White Cliffs of Dover eroding away each year.

I used to be on the board of an organisation called The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility known as ECCR. (It has a website.) Its task was to pressure companies to consider their responsibility towards the environment and the human work force. Some examples are Shell's activities in the Niger Delta, or mining in South America. I once went to a Unilever share holder's AGM. A group of women spoke out against activities in India and mercury production. As time has gone on, and as public opinion has made demands on large multi nationals to look at their environmental impact, so ECCR's emphasis changed. They began to look at investments, the way banks use and invest our money. There was a development of Fair Money Churches. The organisation now encourages people to ask questions of banks as to where their money is invested. When a friend and I set up a chaplaincy service, we needed a bank and we tried to find one that was ethical. It was surprisingly difficult to get them to answer any questions about their corporate responsibilities. In the end, we went with Reliance Bank, which is run by the Salvation Army. I was also thinking of insurance companies and their portfolios. Do we question their stance on ethical issues or do we go for the cheapest? There are so many issues like green energy, deforestation, and water conservation, (though that may not be such a problem in Cumbria).

I read the other day this pandemic is nothing to the trouble we are storing up for ourselves if we do not act. I know it is difficult, as we are coping with so much at present and life is very hard, but as a community and as individuals, we must act even in a small way. We can get inspiration from stories where one person can have an idea that changes whole communities. Someone begins an organisation that lights up people's lives, which inspires others to do the same. We only have to think of Fairtrade and how that began. Now we can get Fairtrade products in some, not all, supermarkets. Our plop in a bucket can make a difference. It is a matter of just thinking about the decision we make. It may not be the cheapest, but which is best?

Some years ago I did an MA and one of the subjects was post modernism. Apparently, there was no longer one big story, just little ones. No grand narrative, and society now lives with a mixed morality and ethic. Well that may be so, but as Christians we do have a story, we do have a creator, and we also have a purpose. That purpose is to share God's love with all and I believe that includes the protection of this wonderful planet. It is God's gift, not just to us in the rich west, but to those who are the poorest and the most vulnerable, both humans and the natural world alike. We have a duty of care. I have a belief that the church must be relevant, it must speak to the world and show it is alive and real. The reality is our world needs to be loved and God can provide us with enough love and wisdom to change things.

God bless you all
Angela