

Sunday 5th September 2021 – Psalm 104 ‘This is God’s world’

‘In the beginning, God...’ The first four words of the bible: and I’m sure many of you were expecting me to complete the sentence on Climate Sunday. Which I will: but let’s take a moment and pause here first. **Before anything else, God.** Just God. Not good and evil battling it out, as in many other worldviews. Just a perfect relationship of love: God as Father, Son and Spirit.

And this God creates the heavens and the earth, as Genesis goes on to say. He doesn’t need to: he wants to. This God loves to share, he wants other beings to experience of the joy of existing, of relating. And so he creates the universe – and keeps on creating it. It’s still expanding at an unbelievable rate even now.

And it doesn’t really matter much how long God took to make this universe. We’ve consumed an awful lot of energy on that question, one which the bible isn’t really bothered about at all. **The bible’s concern is *who*, not *how*:** there is a Infinite Creative Mind and Power which lies behind it all: Almighty God.

Even the science backs this up. What’s known as the Anthropic Principle has calculated that the chance of a planet like ours capable of supporting the diversity and complexity of life which it does is infinitesimally small. Similarly, the chance of inert matter suddenly becoming active and life-giving – the basic requirement for the start of life on earth – is similarly small. The church rightly takes issue with gambling, but maybe we would make our case more effectively with the population at large by saying that no serious gambler would bet on our universe being the product of chance. It would be absolute madness to do so. The odds are totally in favour of something – or Someone – being behind it all.

And in today’s glorious Psalm (104) we see the presence and power of God throughout his creation laid bare. **This God is great and glorious:** wrapped in light, riding on the wings of the wind, moving vast bodies of water, and creating an abundant world.

To many modern ears, this reliance on God may sound simplistic – but maybe we’ve lost something even more precious through our obsession with explaining the process. Don’t get me wrong, modern science is a marvellous thing – itself an outworking of our God-given potential as human beings – but to leave God out of the equation is like having a wonderful meal at a famous restaurant and talking only of how the temperature of the oven accelerates the chemical processes which break down the fats – and forgetting to say: ‘wow, that chef is good!’

When we look at the world, we’re meant to say what the psalmist says: ‘Wow! This God is awesome.’

That, of course, is a double-edged sword. The psalm itself refers quite openly both to the joyful abundance of creation as well as the terrifyingly powerful forces at work as well. And as our news screens filled this week with Hurricane Ida, as well as more terrible storms in Europe, just two weeks after record temperatures and widespread fires, many people no doubt find themselves asking if God to blame for these, too.

There's no simple answer to that question: all we can say is that **the things which make our planet capable of sustaining life are also the things which bring unpredictability**. Unless the earth has tectonic plates which push against each other creating mountains and consequently continents of dry land and weather systems which support cultivation, the whole planet would simply be covered with a layer of water and would be uninhabitable – or to put it another way, we wouldn't exist. But this process which brings life also causes earthquakes, floods and other extreme events. We can't have one without the other: if God takes away the floods and earthquakes, he also takes away the systems which allow us to inhabit the planet.

The psalmist didn't know any of that, but his or her answer is just as true today: we look to God to renew the face of the ground, and we also look forward to a day when the imperfections of this world will be gone. This Creating God will one day Re-create the heavens and the earth.

But what does all this mean for us today? As we dedicate the next 5 weeks to celebrating our world, as well as our responsibility to look after it, we remind ourselves firstly that **our world is both remarkable and at risk**. We'll look at the implications of that in more detail as the series progresses. But let's celebrate today the 'remarkable' side of that. What I have learned most from the psalmist this week is simply to be inspired by his or her capacity for wonder. This psalm is a hymn of praise, a celebration of the whole beauty and complexity of creation: from mountains and seas to grass and wheat.

So often we miss the astonishing beauty of even the little things: for example the wing of a housefly. There are trillions of houseflies in the world, and most of us can't stand them – but I can only marvel at the beauty of their wings! Has any great painter or craftsman created anything more beautiful? And it doesn't need to be beautiful – it just *is*. Can you imagine the pleasure God took in making that, and perhaps the divine chuckle at putting something so beautiful on a pest?

This week we've launched our latest free online art exhibition – if you haven't looked at it yet, take a few moments to do so (the link is on our website and church emails) and marvel at the beauty of our world.

But finally, **let's remember whose world this is**. So often we live as if this is our world. But it's only on loan to us. The real owner is God. And I believe that unless we recover a sense that we are answerable to Someone greater, we are not going to make the radical changes we'll need to make in the next 10 years to mitigate the climate storm that's coming.

May Psalm 104 speak to us again today, and may we declare, with renewed inspiration: 'Praise the Lord, my soul.' Amen.