

3rd September 2023 – Good News #1 ‘A world made good’ (Genesis 1:26-2:7)

‘In the beginning, God...’ It all starts there. Those are, of course, the first words of the bible, and although much of the time we think of faith in human terms – about how human beings engage with the spiritual world, we should never forget that that the start point is God – always God, only God. What makes the first words of Genesis revolutionary is that it doesn’t start with conflict and chaos. All the other creation accounts of the time this was written start with a great battle between good and evil, and out of the violence of this cosmic clash the world is formed. Not in Genesis – in the beginning, God. Only God. God alone creates the heavens and the earth. It begins with order and beauty, not chaos. It begins with God.

Today we begin our big Autumn series looking at the heart of the Christian faith. I won’t say the basics of faith as we never move beyond these life-giving truths – let’s say the *essentials* of faith. And the series title is simply this: **‘Good News’**. We live in a confusing world, and many are anxious about their present and their future. There are big questions and even bigger unknowns. We worry about inflation, about the cost of housing and social care, about mutating viruses, about Artificial Intelligence, about a new era emerging of dictators and wars.

Life seems to get more and more complicated – but this Autumn I want to affirm that at its heart, faith is simple – *life* is complicated, but *faith* is simple. The reason we think faith is hard is because we try and fit faith into life and not the other way round. We don’t start with God. We naturally start with us and then try and squeeze bits of faith into the cracks. We look at the complexity of life and ask ourselves: how does a 2,000-year-old faith cope with this kind of world? But we’re looking through the wrong end of the telescope. It doesn’t start with us. It all starts with God. If we start with God and then look at life from that start point, life in general – and our lives in particular – start to make a lot more sense.

I hope that this Autumn we’ll find God’s perspective on our world and our lives hitting us between the eyes with fresh power, as well as renewed hope and enthusiasm. And as we uncover, or recover, the heart of what Christians believe, we’ll find that faith is not just more straightforward than we’d remembered, but also more than sufficient to deal with the complications of life. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the bible tells me so. Wouldn’t it be good to recover that simple joy in the love of Jesus, a love supreme that permeates and dissolves all the hard edges of our complicated lives? That would be good news, wouldn’t it?

In the week that a survey of some of my colleagues made the front pages of the national newspapers talking about how many of them are dissatisfied and would change things, I think it’s a good time to remind ourselves that what Christians believe is good news. That’s what the very word gospel means – good news!

And this good news starts with God. And this God loves creating. He doesn’t want a cold universe where he lives on his own, so he makes a world which is full of life. He fills it with light, and with water, and then with plants and birds and animals. If you read the whole first chapter of the bible (we only read from v26), you’ll see how this God loves beauty and order. The first three days create light, then water and sky, then land. The second three days match the first three days – the fourth day he creates the specific lights, the fifth day the creatures which fill the water and the sky, and then on the sixth day the animals which fill the land.

We get so hung up on questions of science we miss the point. This is not a scientific account of how the world was made, **this is a personal memoir which tells us who made the world, and what kind of being this extraordinary creator is like.** And this creator loves beauty and order, and also wonder. ‘He also made the stars.’ Is that not the most mind-blowing five words ever written? The entire enormity of the universe, the greatest construction project ever undertaken condensed into one phrase. God doesn’t need to make the universe this big, by the way – but the fact that he does suggests that he both loves wonder and has an irrepressible energy and joy.

But this God is still alone. Yes, he has this beautiful, good world – but there’s no-one he can really have a deep relationship with – apart from himself. We learn later that this God already has perfect relationship with himself, although the hints are here even in these opening lines of scripture: the word for ‘God’ in the first line of the bible is a very unusual word which is plural but takes a singular verb. We also have the Spirit of God identified specifically in verse 2 and in verse 3 God speaks. Why? Have you ever wondered who he was speaking to? So even in the first three verses we learn that God is one, but has different facets to his being, and also loves to communicate – God creates through his Word. St John and St Paul later understand that the speaking God in verse 3 is in fact the Divine Son – but we’re getting ahead of ourselves....

God loves relationship and loves to communicate. But this God needs someone to communicate with and relate to on a deep level – and so after 5 ½ days of good creating, God makes human beings. And with human beings, creation is now very good. And let’s note that **human beings are made in God’s image** – they have something extra to the rest of creation, an X-factor, they bear the image of their creator in a unique way. And from what we’ve already seen of God, we have a pretty good idea what this image means:

It means they love beauty and order, they have a capacity for wonder, they have the ability to create and make and fix things, they love to communicate and they are made to relate. We’ve seen all this directly from the text already. We can reasonably infer from this that human beings will have additional capacities to enable some of these other basic qualities: a unique ability to organise and problem solve, to question and evaluate, and to mould and shape things – this latter capacity being able to be used for good or ill... which is a question more for next week.

One last observation about this world made good. The bible gives us two accounts of creation. The big picture one in chapter 1, and something much more intimate in chapter 2. That’s why I’ve included a part of both in our reading. Because the question ch1 doesn’t answer is *how* God makes humans in his image – and in ch2 we get the answer. The Lord breathes into the first human, and, as it says, ‘the man became a living soul’. **We bear the image of God because we carry the breath of God.** The word for Spirit also means breath – so God breathes his Spirit into Adam, and turns carbon-and-water into divinely-blessed spiritual existence.

You’re [here/watching](#) today because of this one beautiful act of God. It is *that* divine breath that causes you to wonder, to worship, to ask why, to desire something more than physical existence. However much that breath can sometimes get suffocated, that is why you are you. Next week we’ll look at how humanity spoiled things – but today let’s bask in the original pattern of things. God made a good world – and this God made us, too – unique, loved, bearing the divine blueprint. You are God’s special creation. God put all his best work into you. And because of that, knowing you and being with you really matters to God. My prayer is that knowing God and being with God matters to you, too. It’s how you were made. It’s who you are. It’s who God calls all of us to be. Amen.