

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

Reflection – Second Sunday before Lent – 20th February 2022

Reader Jane Quarmby

Our readings today all emphasise the power of God shown in creation. Genesis, whilst it might conflict with modern day understanding of the immense timescales inherent in how this beautiful planet of ours in all its diversity and balance, its miraculous symmetry and ability to regenerate despite our abuse of it, came into being, does have important points to make to us. We may think we are masters of the universe, but nature has her secrets and immense power which we don't fully understand. For example, research is now showing that trees have an underground communication and pastoral care system. They can alert neighbours to attacks from insects and birds, telling them to produce toxins, channel nutrients to sick trees, and work together for the good of the forest. Whales, the Bible's Leviathans, sing to each other across vast distances.

One of the lessons from Genesis is that God, having created a beautiful fertile Garden, in Eden, placed the man that he had made into the garden to tend and watch over it. As I know only too well, gardens don't stand still, they are constantly changing and need a lot of hard work to keep them looking good. And that was the job God gave the man. I have a little sign that a friend gave me saying "you are closer to God in a garden" and that works for me. To be outside in the fresh air, listening to the birds singing, nurturing plants so that they will reward us with colour, beauty and scent, or good things to eat, is a real pleasure. Even at this time of year, when it's all about cutting back dead growth and hauling wheelbarrows of manure to spread on my flower beds, I get an enormous amount of satisfaction seeing order come from the mess left over from last year; and from seeing the spring bulbs pushing through heralding the flowers soon to burst forth, catching the scent of the winter honeysuckle, and seeing seeds germinate in the glasshouse. It's also a good reminder to me that I am just the caretaker – I don't control the

weather, I can't make a seed germinate or a bulb put up new leaves and buds. And Adam, that first man, couldn't either.

But he did have a very close and personal relationship with God. God brought him the animals to name, giving him responsibility; the Garden was a holy sanctuary where God walked with Adam, he talked to him directly and was concerned that Adam had no helper that was just right for him. This God who had created all things, was worried. That is so like a parent, isn't it – to worry that your child is lonely and doesn't have a partner? So God not only created woman to be at Adam's side in his life and work, but also created the first marriage and binding covenant – he gives a bride to Adam, and Genesis explains that this is why when a man marries, he leaves his parents and becomes one with his wife.

So Adam and his wife are both custodians of the Garden for God.

The point which is made in Genesis about God the Creator is picked up again in our psalm today. It sings of how God made the mountains, quieted the raging oceans, and continues to take care of the earth, watering it, making it rich and fertile (I'm still waiting for that particular miracle in our garden), sending rain, and blessings of wonderful harvests and flocks of sheep. It's a real song of praise for God the Creator, and very respectful of the power inherent in all that God does. With God doing all the hard work, it then begs the question: what are we doing as his custodians?

Why are we polluting our world with toxic gases, heating it to the point of no return if we don't get a grip right now, doing so much damage that fires rage across hundreds of kilometres, chopping down or digging up the very plants which give us our oxygen and enable us to breathe? The Amazon was deforested more in January this year than any month previously. Storms batter every part of the world, fiercer and more frequent, glaciers and the Arctic are melting, extreme heat is being endured in Canada of all places. From my tranquil garden I can see a band of pollution if I look towards Marseille. What sort of gardeners are we? Is God happy with us? How will he judge us? How will our children and grandchildren judge our generation?

It's tempting to see our Gospel reading as telling us not to worry, God will make it all ok in the end. This short story about faith has an undercurrent of showing just how powerful God is. The disciples are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee which is

surrounded by high hills so when the wind gets up it can really whistle through creating dangerous storms. It wasn't a tiny rowing boat, but it was in danger of sinking. Some of the disciples on board were fishermen, sailors who knew these waters and for them to panic then they really were in trouble. Whilst they are dashing about bailing out and trying to save the boat and those in it, Jesus is curled up having a well-earned nap. He's been preaching and healing, and that takes a lot of energy, even for the Son of God. I would love to know what the disciples were hoping for when they woke him up. Was it as a last resort, or to make sure he was awake and could help in some way save the boat? Or for a final blessing before they all drowned? What they got wasn't what they expected – they received a telling off for not having faith in him. He calmly rebuked the waves and the wind, and the storm stopped. All was calm. Did he then go back to sleep as in all in a day's work? Leaving the disciples to work it out for themselves as to what had just happened. Did they pinch themselves to see if it hadn't all been a horrible nightmare? Or did they suddenly grasp that this was no ordinary man. This really was God in human form because no other explanation would fit. Only God could have done this, only God has such power over creation.

We humans can use the power of wind and waves, but we can't control it. Garry and I could only watch aghast as our newly installed and heavily weighted solar panels gracefully blew flat on their faces in the recent Mistral. Nothing we could do about it. A reminder of just how powerless we humans are in the face of the natural world.

But the disciples' reaction is only too common in the face of impending catastrophe. All too often we leave it too late to ask for God's help and intervention, we muddle along relying on ourselves – it doesn't occur to us that whilst we don't have the power to resolve a crisis, God does. Jesus told us just to ask in his name and it will be granted. But to do that means keeping him fully in mind and alongside us, not trusting in our own capabilities. If the ship is sinking then only God can prevent it, regardless of how much bailing out we do. Faith should be at the forefront of our minds, not a last resort.

But we also need to keep in mind that in the words of St Teresa of Avila "Christ has no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world. Christ has no body on earth but yours." So we do all

need to do our bit in times of crisis – and to be good custodians of this wonderful, beautiful planet on which we live, with God’s help and direction.

Amen