

Trinity 2 2009

Job is firmly put in his place.

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb?

Poor Job, complaining about the injustice of his lot, is reminded of God's power over nature, reminded that humans, even the very best of them, are but a part of the wonder of creation.

God is so powerful, so wonderful, we should never question his actions.

This power over creation is seen in the gospel story too, as Jesus calms the storm, rebuking the wind and the sea as the disciples fearfully shout to him

'Master, do you not care that we are perishing?'

The relationship of God to his creation is very explicit in the bible.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

There is the imagination, the creation of potential, the delight in the beauty of the universe. There is also unimaginable power, the power to move mountains, to still the storm.

Yet our experience of God in creation is more like that of Job. There are earthquakes, mosquitoes carrying malaria, there are droughts and tornadoes, disasters of all shapes and sizes. And there are extinctions. God's creation reduced, wiped out.

How does this fit with an all-powerful God? How does it fit with the Bible?

Consider the children's story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the Narnia books by C. S Lewis, set in a parallel world with talking animals, the Christ Figure is not a human being but a lion called Aslan, huge and powerful. One of the books deals with creation, the beginning, when Aslan breathes life into a barren world – Genesis Chapter 1 translated to another world. In the first of the books, Aslan who has become friend, teacher and guide to the children, allows himself to be put to death to save the world from evil. He is bound and placed upon a rock and killed with a knife in the heart. The children who watch cannot understand. He is so powerful, so strong, why doesn't he fight? Why is he not using his power?

This allegory of the death of Jesus, put so simply (if in what is now rather dated language), is about the free surrender of power by God for the love of creation.

God does not intervene to prevent disasters, not because he doesn't love us, but because he loves us so much that he has given us the greatest freedom of all, free will. We can accept or reject his love. We can also accept or reject responsibility for his creation.

When we accept, then we begin to see, to feel, God's power. For it is only when we work with God that we can experience this.

Our relationship to God's creation is, or at least should be, that of a co-worker. We have been made partners. We can use that trust well or we can abuse our position.

Our track record in this is not good. So far, in the five minutes since I started preaching this sermon 59 hectares of rainforest equivalent to over 2000 Wimbledon Tennis Courts will have been destroyed, the world population will have increased by nearly 800 people, and over 3 millions tons of global ice will have melted. We are seeing deserts expanding, rivers drying up, sea level rising, and extinctions increasing at an alarming rate. Many of them are small and to our mind insignificant creatures or plants, but as the timing of flowering gets out of kilter with breeding seasons for insects and birds, we may suddenly see an exponential increase in extinctions that will threaten world food supplies to an unprecedented degree.

We must learn to be co-workers with God and that means that we have to learn from his ways.

The tragedy of being human is that we have an overwhelming urge for a total freedom which is never possible if we accept that we are created. Like Job, we have to learn our place. Yes, we have been given amazing freedom, freedom to create or destroy. But we have also been given responsibility, we have been given limits, and above all we have been given the example of Christ. We have to be prepared to make the sacrifice of love. We have to accept that we do not know everything. We have to accept that we are a part of creation, not set apart from it, over and above it.

This Franciscan approach puts humanity on a par with the rest of creation and yet with responsibility for it. However, given that Christian teaching has taught us that there is Christ in all of us (Matthew 25: 40) if there is no corresponding theory of God's immanence in all creation, this sets humanity over and above the rest of nature and stewardship risks becoming paternalistic, however beneficent it is.

The book of Job reminds us of God in all creation. It reminds us of our place within that creation, of how small we are compared to the majesty and power of God. That knowledge might crush us, make us feel so small so powerless that we can do nothing. But it doesn't, because alongside it we have our understanding of Christ – the one who fished with the disciples, healed the sick, stilled the storm, but who was put to death, rose again and is now one with God. From his life and death we learn that self-offering, the sacrifice of love, is the greatest power of all. It is this love, the love of the Father, that can move mountains, and defeat even evil and death.

We may do many extraordinary things in our own strength, creating new means of transport or communication, seeding rain clouds and cleaning the oceans, but if we want to have real transforming creative power, that can only be found in the offering of love in Christ. To accept such a gift means to understand the nature of gift, to understand the obedience of gratitude. To accept such a gift means surrender of our self-interest to his will. This is what it would mean to be a co-worker with Christ.

It is no good us crying out in fear:

'teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'

Of course he cares. He has shown us over and over again how to still the storm, but we are too busy overfishing the seas to listen.