

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg by Rev. Geoff Read

Sunday 16th September 2018 / Creationtide 2

Bible text: Psalm 104:24

When you hear the word “wise” what do you think of?

The inscrutable Buddha.

An elderly man or woman, calm, poised, their white beard or lined face speaking of experience

Maybe a mentor or coach you have had at crucial moments in your career

Its not a word we use much today. Yes, clever, famous, celebrity, knowledgeable, skilled, successful.

But wise doesn't make the front page or business pages of our newspapers very often

And in our psalm, in this verse it almost seems a surprise too: O Lord you have made so many things, how beautiful, how intricate, how awesome, how ... you have made them all

But wise?

We have a saying in English: going to the heart of the matter, the heart of an issue – that which is fundamental, at the core

Our memory verse is the heart of this psalm – it's the verse to which all the first part points and leads, it's the one out of which the rest then flows

And it says this in NRSV:

O Lord, how manifold are your works.

In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

That God's works are “manifold” – a word that highlights the sheer scale of the created order, and also its variety

And that God's works are “wise”

And it's that word “wise” that I want to explore today

Depending on the translation the meaning is:

- that God has acted wisely in the act of creation,
- that somehow wisdom is woven into the fabric of creation,
- and also that wisdom is the attribute we need to live well in this sort of creation

And each of those three is true and I want us to explore and consider all three now

Firstly, seeing Wisdom as an attribute of God, most clearly revealed in his creativity. This comes out plainly in another translation of our verse:

What a wildly wonderful world, God!

You made it all, with Wisdom at your side,

made earth overflow with your wonderful creations. (The Message)

This personification of wisdom, seeing her as a helper in creation is repeated on a number of occasions in the Bible. Indeed, many believe that later on that figure of Wisdom becomes associated the Holy Spirit

And wisdom as a part of God's creativity is shown in yes, the intricacy, the sophistication, the sheer awesomeness of creation, the Wow moments we considered last week

But it is also about the interrelatedness, the interdependence of the created order.

Today we might talk about this in terms of the insights of systems theory – the insights of climate change, human communities and organisations, watch how starlings fly together in those amazing murmerations, wheeling and pulsing

Wisdom moves beyond a purely mechanistic, utilitarian understanding of creation and moves us towards a relational one

Wisdom says, In the beginning God created, and that creation is the overflow of love within the very Personhood of God,

Wisdom says our God continues to be actively engaged in creation and recreation, sustaining and interacting with His creation

So that's wisdom as part of who God is

Now secondly, if God has handled and created with hands of wisdom, then we should expect to see the fingerprints of wisdom in the world

And here we need to start thinking about wisdom in a slightly different way

The way the Bible talks about wisdom is different from certainty and perfection

Wisdom is rooted in the reality of life in the world as it is.

It seeks to hold together, on the one hand, an understanding of that world made good by a loving God who continues to be engaged with His creation with, on the other, the mystery of the stuff we encounter in our daily lives

Wisdom, for example rejoices that this morning we baptise two beautiful children who share so much. And wisdom also recognises that they have a different genetic make-up and that Holly has also had a particularly tough start in life with her recent surgery

Wisdom seeks to understand how to love both children, indeed its wisdom that all parents need in parenting all children, enabling us to enable them to grow and flourish, enabling each of them to bring their own unique gifts and contribution to their family, their community, their world

To say "In wisdom, O God, you have made all your works" is an invitation to see life with both faith and realism, to say that God is revealed in all He has made and is making and remaking and renewing

And that brings me to the third angle on wisdom as regards our verse

In the Bible there are different sorts of literature. Lots of it is about who God is, what He has done, what He commands and longs for from human beings. It reveals who God is and we have seen that in these verses.

But the reference to Wisdom points us to another sort of writing in the Bible that tells us not about God but about the thoughts and feelings of human beings of faith as they seek to make sense of life and the creation from the perspective of faith and to then live well

This Wisdom literature – the book of Proverbs, some of the Psalms, Lamentations – shows us the ways others before us have thought and have acted

That its OK to ask questions – questions that seek to go deep in understanding both the how and why of creation, that wisdom encourages scientific research and critical thinking

The questions of the Wisdom tradition also include the angry questions of bewilderment and apparent unfairness, of exhaustion in the face of overwhelming odds – what makes them wisdom is that they are still asked of God, the relationship goes on

Wisdom encourages us at times to lament, to pour out grief and sadness to God at the loss of what is and what might have been

It encourages us also to rejoice, to recognise God's goodness and grace in both the obvious and unobvious places and circumstances, to expect goodness and justice to eventually emerge and to give us wisdom in how to think and speak and act as we work for that

Most challenging but also most comforting is the Hebrew word that describes one of the wisdom books, indeed our book called Psalms – and it is the one word "Praise"

Praise is what the creature offers to its creator. And so wisdom says, all the time we keep this perspective we are free to be real and authentic in our multi-faceted engagement with this wonderful, complex, perplexing world

Its praise to say day in, day out:

O Lord you have made so many things, how wisely you have made them all.