

Sermon for Morning Prayer on the 2nd Sunday before Lent (24 February 2019) - *Mike Fox*

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-25

Another Account of the Creation

Luke 8:22-25

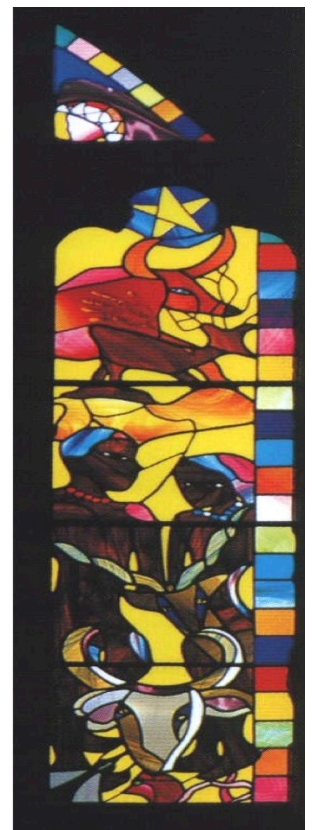
Jesus Calms a Storm

I'm on a count down towards my sabbatical now which starts on Ash Wednesday, so these Sundays before Lent have a special significance for me. But, it's good for all of us to be prepared for the season of Lent and ask what change there will be in our lives during that time. Will we be giving something up or taking something on – I will be giving up leading worship for a period of three months, but I will also be taking on an in-depth study of mindfulness through meditation and how to come closer to the Spirit within. There is a variety of options for us to study during Lent: all the churches are putting something on and we agreed at our last Churches Together meeting that we would all welcome visitors from each other's churches to our Lenten meetings – it's good to get other perspectives in order to tease out our understanding, but it's also good to meet with others from our own church in order to get to know them better.



So, let's ponder on our readings for today. I wonder what we believe about the created order. First of all, was it created, or did it just happen? Scientists spend a lot of their time developing theories about all kinds of physical phenomena and then, because they are scientists, they define a way of describing what they believe and devise tests to find out whether their descriptions, or theories, fit the results. May I say that it is just as useful to have tests fail as for them to succeed – if they fail, the theories need to be adjusted in some way; if they succeed, more refined tests need to be tried to cover a greater range of conditions and so to improve the theory. Whatever theories are being tested, the scientists can only ever define what they observe and how things work; they can never define why things are there or what purpose they may have. That's an entirely different question and moves the topic into the realm of theology and whether there is a Creator, or God behind all that we sense in the world around us.

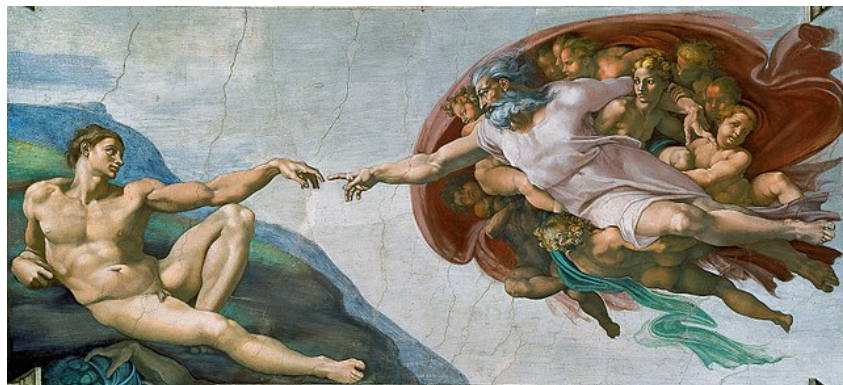
The first story of creation in Genesis 1 speaks of the wind from God sweeping over the face of the waters, the spirit if you like or breath of God if you would prefer a human touch. We may like to know that wind, spirit and breath are all feminine in the original Hebrew and that probably aligns with what many of us think about how life is nurtured; it is more commonly the female who is dedicated to bringing up offspring to maturity and concerned with the gentler aspects of life – not always, of course; the male can be gentle and compassionate too. But it may make us stop and ponder about the gender of God ... or we may think that God is beyond all that and it is not at all relevant (or reverent either! – whoever started the craze of referring to God as He?) This first creation story tells of an almighty God who simply speaks things into existence (we see this in our gospel reading); this God is unapproachable, transcendent, all-powerful, all-knowing, beyond our



Day 6 of  
"The Six Days of Creation"  
Chester Cathedral

understanding, though we are placed into the created order in God's own image, to do God's will and be responsible for everything around us – that is at the same time a privilege and a challenge to live up to.

The second story of creation that we heard today from Genesis 2 speaks of a God who dwells with us and enjoys our company. As in the first story, we are given work to do and animals to look after, but we are not completely fulfilled until we have formed community with each other. We have an intimate relationship with God; He is immanent, essential, natural, present in all things, a good companion, but we need also to have others of our kind to share our lives with. Not only does God share His love with us, but He encourages us to love one another; that needs to be on a much broader level than the individual love between husband and wife or members of our family, but a generous love towards our neighbour here and across the world, and more generally a love towards the whole of creation. We are here as part of the whole, indeed we cannot survive without it, so our concern needs to extend not just to other human beings, but to our common environment, our access to food, clean water, shelter, health care and anything else that we need. We can never consider ourselves to be outside the system, looking in as it were; we are for ever part of it.



Creation of Adam, a fresco painted by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel ceiling

The one thing that we need to do is to discover who we really are and the role that we are intended to play within the world. The two stories in Genesis give us a clue that people view God in different ways, and there's a whole spectrum in between. The story about Jesus being with the disciples in the boat show him spanning the whole range. At the beginning of the story, Jesus was clearly one of them, a friend, someone they look up to, but who is able to share their adventures together. As the storm builds up, they began to fear for their safety, and realise that Jesus is going to sleep through the whole thing unless they did something about it. So, they call him: "*Master, Master, we are perishing!*" I don't know if you've had an experience like that. I can remember, when Rosemary and I were learning to sail, one of



Jesus calming the storm: "peace, be still"  
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the tests we had to do was to experience capsizing and to walk around the hull in the water and haul the boat upright again; my! it was cold! It's easier said than done, and if you're getting cold, your strength melts away – I'd still be there if our coach hadn't made it a little bit easier for me. There's always reliance on the person who knows what to do. Jesus had the answer that trumps everything else – he simply "*rebuked the wind and the raging waves*" – saying "peace, be still". So, the disciples encountered Jesus as the one who was always present, just one of them, and at the other end of the spectrum as the Master who commanded the elements to calm down, God himself; both of the Gods we discovered in the creation stories. Jesus was able to span that range

of being in an amazing way.

So, how are we to emulate that? The quick answer is that we can't ... but, remembering that we are all different, we can live to the extent of our potential if we seek it out and practice sufficiently. That, in a nutshell, is what I will be trying to do during my sabbatical. I will be seeking to explore who I am, what I am capable of and trying some things out. I will be doing it largely through online coaching by Craig Hamilton as he teaches "*the practice of direct awakening*" and going as far as I can – it will be a big adventure and I'm looking forward to it. The key is to let go of all the self-limiting controls that I place upon myself and seek for the essence that is present in every one of us. I'll be doing it through guided meditation and, hopefully, a deeper understanding of how to listen to the Spirit who is always present to guide, inspire and empower us all. This Spirit is the same person that the disciples turn to in the boat to rescue them from a situation beyond their capability, except that in their case, the Spirit is there in the form of their Master Jesus. Today, we can find that Spirit in the depths of our own being.

Jesus promises the disciples in the Upper Room on the night before he was tried and put to death on the cross that he will: "*ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*" [John 14:16,17]. We can detect the change in the disciples when they see the winds and waves calm down at the command of Jesus. Once, they were afraid; now, they are amazed and believe. Their faith has been consolidated in that one experience.

We need to learn how to do the same today ...

... in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, **AMEN**