

2015-02-08 Sue Diggory

2nd Sunday before Lent

Christ is the image of the unseen God

Proverbs 8 v 1 and vv 22 – 31 & Colossians 1 vv 15 – 20 & John 1 vv 1 – 14

When my children were small many of their favourite stories were from the Mr Men series – I'm sure you remember them. They were characters who all behaved as their name suggested, Mr Muddle was always in a muddle, he helped us to understand what it meant to be in a muddle, Mr Bump was always bumping into things and helped us to understand a little about being clumsy and Mr Happy well, he was just as his name suggested!

They all helped us to hold in our minds an image of what each characteristic looked like and what pattern of behaviour we should be expecting to see.

Today's readings, invite us to think about image; God's image and our image as those made in God's image, an image that we see perfected in Jesus, the one who is wholly divine and wholly human, behave in a similar way. Our Old Testament and Gospel readings tell us about two different aspects or characteristics of God's nature as they speak to us through the persona of – Miss Wisdom and Mr Word, and the New Testament reading, from the letter to the Colossians, which is set for today like our Gospel reading looks back to creation, to the beginning of all things.

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

But first let's go back to our first reading and to the Book of Proverbs which is part of the Wisdom tradition within the Hebrew Scriptures, which are made up

of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The Law or the books of Moses are the first five books of our Bible, the Prophets are again books we are familiar with and the Writings include the book of Job, Ecclesiastes and the book of Proverbs. These writings were to guide and instruct; to help understand how to lead a good and prosperous life; to understand more about the nature of God and through that understanding to live in a better way.

In our reading today we hear about the personification of wisdom as a woman as she helps us to see and understand a little more of God's nature, to help us to see that wisdom is much more than just knowing and although we know that God is all knowing, we also need to understand that he is wise and through our reading she helps us to see how important the beauty of his creation was and is important to him; how God was and is in relationship with all he created from the beginning of time. She helps us to see that God is a God who likes to play and delight in all he has created.

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

²² *The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.*

²³ *Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*

And our reading concludes by saying that Wisdom

³⁰ *was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,*

³¹ *rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.*

And not only does God delight in his creation he also delights in us. Miss Wisdom helps to show us this relationship of love that God has with every aspect of the world he has created.

And then as we turn to our Gospel reading, that famous reading that we hear each Christmas and we are introduced to another aspect of God's nature as we encounter Mr Word. *In the beginning was the word* – the word like wisdom has been part of God since the beginning of time, there taking an active part as

creation began to 'be,' as the formless and empty earth became a world that God saw was good.

Words tell us things and that is what the Word does, the Word tell us exactly what God is like, and this is of course made much easier for us to understand when we use his other name, the name that we are more familiar with – Jesus. The word made flesh, Emmanuel, God with us, the baby who we saw presented at the Temple last week, the baby who became the child who was seen as wise beyond his years and who grew into the man, the man who lived on earth loving us, teaching us, and healing us, the man who was full of the spirit and wisdom and did only the things that were the will of his father.

And in the letter to the Colossians we have a picture, an image of exactly what this means in the person of Christ, the one in whom these different aspects or characteristics of the all-encompassing nature of God, that cannot be separated out come together in Jesus,

the one who *is the image of the invisible God,*

the one who was *the firstborn of all creation*

the one in whom *all things have been created*

the one who is *the head of the body, the church*

the one who is *the firstborn from the dead*

the one in whom *all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*

the one through whom *God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Here we see Miss Wisdom and Mr Word coming together in the person of Christ to show us what God is like, and the more we look to Christ the more we see of God. And the more we look to Christ we see that it is through him that not only was the world created, but it is through him that the world is redeemed, and it is through him, the word made flesh that we find our own pathway to the father as those who are made in his image, even if we are those unlike Miss Wisdom and Mr Word who always show others his characteristics as we live out our daily lives. I wonder which Mr Man would sum you up today and what characteristic what pattern of behaviour we should be expecting to see?

Amen