

RE-ENCHANTING OUR UNIVERSE

Company of Servers' Summer Festival

St. Saviours, Pimlico

Wednesday, June 22nd 2016

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More years ago now – more than I care to remember - when our two sons were perhaps four and six years old, we set out for the day from Lincoln where I was teaching, for the Lincolnshire Wolds. It was a cold, clear March day and one of those wide skies for which the county is famous. We passed a freshly ploughed field, covered with flocks of seagulls. The younger of our sons, looking in amazement at this beautiful scene asked his wise old brother: 'Who looks after the seagulls?' After a pause, the source of all wisdom replied 'God looks after the seagulls.' But this was not enough for the inquisitive youngster. 'Well, who looks after God, then?' Now came a longer pause for deeper thought: 'God looks after *himself*.' Good classical theism, from a six year old. But yet once again for the other one, this wouldn't do: 'But how *can* God look after himself?' asked the budding philosopher of religion. This time, no gap, no time to think, but a terse response: 'Cause he's God, silly!

Well, even from that brief exchange, one could extract so much theological reflection, but let me focus on just what stimulated it. That four-year old had been held in wonder by the scene on that clear late winter morning. I can still remember the landscape, the freshly ploughed clods of earth and the gathering of seagulls. All that there was there was on one level unremarkable. You've probably all encountered similar landscapes. Yet even more important, you have probably all encountered similar responses, and particularly if you've had children yourselves. Indeed perhaps you can remember for yourself such moments of childlike wonderment. It's no accident that, in one memorable encounter, Jesus exhorts his listeners to be childlike – not childish, but childlike. Part of childlike-ness is that *capacity to wonder*, to be amazed by the sheer myriad possibilities of God's creation.

But, there's also a certain sadness that as we mature toward adulthood, so that capacity to wonder seems to fade. As we increase in guile, in critical awareness and in sophistication, so the sheer extraordinary miracle of creation becomes overtaken by the quotidian, the everyday. Of course, our remarkable developed world doesn't encourage wonder. For, all that we encounter is now mediated. Even in the earlier part of the twentieth century more of the populace lived within or on the edge of a rural world. Half a century earlier England was still an agrarian society. The yearly cycle of seasons had direct impact on the crops and the harvest. God was in his heaven and all was right with his world – or *not* if there was storm and tempest. Now, however, our world has become *un-enchanted* – almost entirely mediated

It is, however, to this theme of *enchantment* that both our readings direct us. Counter-intuitively, let me begin with Paul and the New Testament. Paul talks of how the grace of Christ has spoken through him 'by the power of signs and wonders.' But it is his final sentence that is most powerful of all – and it is a direct quotation from the Old Testament. Reminding them of Isaiah's prophecy, Paul challenges them to live and proclaim the mystery of the living God:

'They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him.'

This plumbing of the mystery of our existence is what is provoked, stimulated, incarnated in Jesus Christ. But it stands within a most powerful tradition, as Paul's quoting of Isaiah makes clear. That directly points us across towards our first reading. It is part of that unique and inspiring challenge from God to Job. Chapters 38 and 39 take us out of that often tedious and depressing dialogue with the comforters. These two chapters lift us out of Job's almost intransigent despair, to the most *enchanted* challenge by God to Job. So it begins:

‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it. Or who laid its cornerstone - when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?’

By now, the Almighty has got into his stride, and later we read: ‘Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the constellations in their season or guide Aldebaran with its children?’

By the time we encounter the chapter which we heard today, we arrive at almost a bestiary, a compendium of living things: ‘Do you know when the mountain goats spring forth? Who has let the wild ass go free? Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars?’ But, all that issues here is not simply fine poetry. It roots our existence in divine creation. In essence, even our understanding of morality is not simply personal choice. Its objectivity is rooted in the enchantment of our world. For Christian people that means in the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What remarkable good fortune (or perhaps enchantment) that these readings should be set for today’s festival. For where more richly do we encounter the enchantment of God’s creation, but in divine worship? Where is the work of the *Company of Servers* focused? Nowhere other than in drawing our hearts and minds into the love of God in Jesus Christ in worship. All of you are part of that wider band of enchanters, who, in Jesus are performing the *Opus Dei*. As we perform the mystery of God in our liturgical worship, so we take our part in re-enchanting God’s universe.

Amen

Readings

Romans 15. 14-21.

Job. 39 xxxix