

Second Sunday before Lent 2019 (24.03.19)

Evensong

Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3; Matthew 6: 25 – 34

I'm tempted this evening to ask anyone who was here this morning to put their hand up; give out newspapers to you all; and just re-read this morning's sermon to everybody else – only knowing you blighters you'd probably all put your hands up . . . and we'd end up having to raid Tim Sykes' stash of Cathedral Music Quarterly from the back choir stalls!

The reason I'm tempted is this. This morning's Old Testament lesson was an account of the creation from Genesis and the New Testament lesson (the Gospel) was a reading encouraging us not to worry because God's in control. And this evening's Old Testament lesson is an account of the creation from Genesis and the New Testament lesson is a reading encouraging us not to worry.

What I did mention this morning is that there is a magnificent setting of the creation account in Genesis 1 (this evening's reading) by Aaron Copeland. And what I've subsequently learned is that Becky Leeson has sung the soprano solo in it. And as it is very soprano solo dependent, another option is just to sit down and let Becky sing to us for five minutes!

But I guess – even though it's school for some of us in the morning – I guess we ought to spend a few moments reflecting on this passage. I say reflecting on and not unpacking. Because what the Copeland piece illustrates – it's called *In the Beginning* – what it illustrates is that this is a passage simply to be listened to and enjoyed. It's not a passage to be pawed over and pulled apart and analysed. It is not a technical manual of how to create a world. It's not some sort of primitive bio-physicist's text book.

If you want to know how the world was created, don't read the Bible: ask a scientist. But if you want to

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know something about the nature of God; if you want to know something about God's relationship with the world; if you to know something about human beings' relationship with world; and if you want to know something about how all those fit together – then Genesis chapter 1 is what you want to read.

Genesis chapter 1 is a poem; it's a hymn; it's a celebration, and affirmation and a declaration of these fundamental truths: God created the world; God's creation of the world is an on-going generative process; God is at work in the world; we are to be at work in the world with God and answerable to him; we are to be good stewards of the world and not grasping; God is at peace with himself and the world he created; we are invited to be at peace with ourselves and stop relentlessly giving ourselves a hard time; and all this is to be rejoiced over.

Of course, if our security, our stability, our prosperity are dependent on ourselves, on you, on me, on Teresa

May, on Jeremy Corbyn, on Arlene Foster, on Jacob Reece-Mogg, on Chuka Umunna, on Donald Trump, on Shemima Begum's puppeteers, then heaven help us! The birds of the air and the lilies of the field may have nothing to worry about. But if we're not worried, in a very literal and real sense, about the value of our pension pots, about our exchange rate, about our supply chain, about our food security, about our manufacturing base, about the contributions we can make to academic research and the future of our universities, then we're just fools. These worries are very real and very present.

There's no point in standing in the pulpit with a fixed grin and saying these things don't matter because Jesus loves us. But what we can do is proclaim Genesis chapter 1, not to deny the chaos, but to celebrate our unshakable conviction that God offers a commitment and security that transcends that chaos and that equips and enables us to endure it. There is an ultimate, more profound, essential peace and

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assurance that we are sustained, nurtured and nourished. God sees everything that he has made, and indeed, it is very good.

Amen.