



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Third Sunday of Easter

1 May 2022

readings: [Acts 9.1-6](#), [Revelation 5.11-end](#), [John 21.1-19](#)

It feels very prophetic to be standing in our beautiful cathedral church this Sunday surrounded by what looks and feels like a heavenly host of doves.

The reading set for today in Revelation draws us into the heavenly courts when myriads of myriads, thousands of thousands of angels, living creatures and elders are worshipping God and singing 'Worthy is the lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and blessing.' And then every creature in heaven and on earth joins in the mighty chorus, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!'

We are so privileged and blessed to have such an amazing cathedral choir leading our worship and inspiring us with the beauty of music, but can you imagine the glorious and cacophonous sound of every living creature joining in – it would be wondrous and awesome but probably not very tuneful or rhythmic I expect.

There is something particularly powerful and moving about the way in which our worship combines with the worship of heaven.

Being surrounded and enfolded and held today in this cathedral building by this amazing and awe-inspiring bevy or dole or pitying or piteousness of doves feels so evocative and prophetic. At a time when our world is lamenting and crying out in pain because of the horrors of war, the danger our planet and very existence faces due to climate change and our fears and uncertainties as the cost of living has suddenly gone up 3 or 4 times due to rising fuel costs we have chosen to surround ourselves with doves – symbols of the presence of the Holy Spirit and messengers bringing peace and hope.

As individuals and as a world we so desperately need that gift of peace – peace which passes all understanding. Peace that does not depend on us or our situation in life. Peace that transcends our circumstances and situations and that is the deepest of wells we can drink from whenever we find ourselves succumbing to fear or despair or uncertainty.

As we look at our world and the struggles so many face, we can feel overwhelmed and helpless. It is impossible to know how we can help and make a difference and the problems of the world can seem so big and complex.

But the good news is that there is another story that is equally true. Alongside our experience is the reality of the experience of heaven where God is recognized, articulated and worshipped as the Almighty one. And although we are still citizens of this world, we are also citizens of God's kingdom, and we too are invited to join in the song of praise and worship and to live under the authority, kingship and lordship of God.

When you hear our amazing choir sing, I don't know whether you feel inspired to join in or conscious of how unmusical you are. Maybe you feel it would be better if you kept quiet, so you don't spoil the rich and resonant sound and distort the harmony or syncopate the rhythm. As you look at the needs of the world

maybe you feel powerless to make a difference or maybe you are conscious of the ways in which you have added to the pain of the world – the times you didn't recycle or left electric lights on or were afraid of someone different to you or envious of something someone else had that you wanted or myriad of myriad other ways in which we are not the people we would want to be.

But the amazing thing about God is that nothing and no-one is beyond God's reach or God's mercy.

In our reading from Acts this morning we remember Paul's story. At the start of the 6 verses, we read he is breathing murderous threats against the disciples. He is actively and violently persecuting, imprisoning and executing God's people - killing innocents solely on the basis of their faith. He is an archetypal enemy of God – someone who thinks he is righteous, and his actions are justified but someone who is actually persecuting God.

And in our Gospel reading we have the story of Peter – the story of Jesus' closest friend, the one Jesus chose to be the rock on which the church would be built, the one who denied knowing him three times, the one who knew Jesus intimately and effectively stabbed him not only in the back but right in the heart – the betrayal and rejection of a closest friend.

On the road to Damascus Paul encounters the blinding light of God's presence and he falls to the ground and meets Jesus and hears him speaking directly to him. During the next few days of physical blindness Paul is transformed by this incredible, powerful and miraculous encounter with Jesus. He becomes a leader of the church someone who is himself persecuted for Jesus' sake.

In our Gospel story, Simon Peter encounters Jesus – when the disciples first recognize who Jesus is Peter jumps into the water and swims the 100 yards back. He can't wait for the boat to reach shore with its heavy nets laden with fish. Meanwhile Jesus is lighting a fire and preparing breakfast and after eating together he takes Peter aside and speaks into the heart of his betrayal and rejection with the deeply moving questions that search and pierce Simon Peter's heart as he is asked three times– do you love me? And Peter can only reply, 'Yes lord you know that I love you.' Jesus restores their relationship, brings healing to Peter offers him the chance to make amends and start again and commissions him and speaks prophetically of the time when Peter will respond differently under pressure and will face martyrdom for his faith.

As we come to church today it is easy to leave the burdens, we carry at the door all the negativity, pain, struggle and difficulties of the world and to find ourselves transported into the very worship of heaven singing 'Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit'. And then it is tempting to pick those burdens up as we leave and go home to our everyday lives feeling 'as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be world without end'.

But the reality of life in the kingdom of God is that no-one is beyond God's mercy. No situation is beyond God's reach. God is alive and active in our lives and in the world and Jesus offers mercy, grace, peace, healing and transforms our lives if we will let him.

God's desire is to bring everyone into the light and truth of his kingdom as he did Paul, even those who persecute and kill and destroy. No-one is beyond God's redemption and that should encourage us to pray with hope with for all those who don't know his love, for all those who aren't living within his kingdom under his lordship, for all those who currently are acting as God's enemies and persecuting the poor, powerless and God's people made in his image. These stories urge us to be persistent in prayer believing that all things are possible for God. To commit ourselves to praying for family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and even for people we might consider our enemies like terrorists and criminals and the leaders of the nations who have power over so many lives such as President Putin.

But these stories also encourage us to consider how we are living our lives. To seek healing and reconciliation, to set one another free by offering forgiveness and reconciliation and by being willing to be channels of God's love, mercy and grace to one another in our time of need that we might all be touched, healed and transformed by a real and living encounter with the risen Christ and know that we are loved beyond measure and in turn we might love without restraint and join in the crowd of heaven giving glory to God.

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