Proverbs 8: 1, 22-31; Psalm 104: 26-end; Colossians 1: 15-20; **John 1: 1-14**

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

As the observant among you will have noticed, we have finally moved from the white altar frontal of celebration for Christmas and Epiphany back to the green of Ordinary Time, and thence, very shortly, we will return to the penitential purple of Lent, which we saw most recently as the preparational purple of Advent.

And the observant will also have noticed that the readings we have heard this morning all relate to the Creation in one way or another:

The Old Testament reading from Proverbs 8 – page 602 in your pew Bibles if you want to look at it – is talking about the personification of Wisdom and says: The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth…. And goes on in the same vein for the whole passage. It rings all sorts of bells that remind us of the Creation story told in Genesis 1.

Then the Psalm, the latter verses of Psalm 104: When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

And the letter to the Colossians, page 197 in your Bibles: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, and: all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And last, but not least by a long way, the gospel reading from John, which we are used to hearing at Christmas: In the beginning was the Word, and: All things came into being through him. And so on.

And with Lent coming upon us quite rapidly now – only a week and a half to Ash Wednesday – we might be finding ourselves starting to think about denying ourselves various things. (Or taking UP various things, which is a more fruitful line to take and an opportunity for a shameless plug for the Lent Course, which starts on February 21st – Wednesday evenings at 8pm in the Belli Centre).

But that self-denial, which characterises many people’s Lents, involves turning away from the world and its pleasures towards that which is unworldly in some way. We deny ourselves in order to remind ourselves of the unimportance of this world and the joys of the world to come. Or something….

Yet here we are being reminded quite forcefully by all four of today’s readings, that the physical world, the world we inhabit, is itself a huge gift from God. And if we deny ourselves worldly pleasure during Lent, then that is only to serve as a reminder that the world around us, though often desecrated by humankind, is to be treated both with reverence and with generosity. We are called to remember that Christ, who was at the beginning, also, by his death on the cross, reconciled all things, earthly and heavenly.

And in a way, that ending of the Colossians passage drew my attention to the beginning of those few verses: he is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is, indeed, the image of the invisible God, but then we also remember that we humans are made in God’s image. Back to Genesis 1 again. But what might this mean?...

The sometimes-irritating thing with Facebook is that stuff you have already seen comes round again a while later, and so I am sure I’ve quoted this one before, but I also think it stands being requoted: You can safely assume that you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.

We always try to make Jesus look just like us. And in a sense, of course, he does: if we look around, both inside and outside the church, we will find the image of Jesus in all manner of people. Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes, Jesus with designer stubble, Jesus with a full-blown beard. Jesus in a skirt. Or jeans. Jesus child-size. Jesus wearing a black leather jacket and riding a motor bike. Jesus in a business suit talking to clients.

Unfortunately, we also often create him in line with our own desires, hopes, and character. And when we do that, and we think we find him there, it’s a bit like looking into a pool of water; what we end up actually seeing is a very indistinct reflection of ourselves.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. The word for image in Greek is εἰκών, meaning a likeness or representation – our word ‘icon’ obviously. So Jesus is not merely a picture of God but actually contains God’s likeness: he was literally both human and divine – not half and half but entirely both. Hard to get our heads around, but without that understanding, our grasp of the Trinity falls apart. Go back to John 1: He was in the world, and the world came into being through him – or pretty well any other statement from that passage……

Can we recognize that while Jesus is just like us, he is also totally unlike us? And it is our job not to adapt Jesus to our own small views of the world, but to adapt ourselves to his big view.

Going back to the whole Creation thing that was such a major image in today’s readings, that was first how God revealed himself to humankind – through beauty and wonder, and then also through other people – the great leaders of the Old Testament stories just as a for-instance, who lived their lives faithful to God …… But then the advent of Jesus, God incarnate, showed us the full and final revelation of God: living all the human stuff, including pain and suffering and death, loving even when love was so incredibly costly. Sacrificial love – the love we might feel for our partners, parents, children, but not ever for the whole of the human race.

The image of the invisible God. As Tom Wright, past Bishop of Durham, puts it: it’s by looking at Jesus that we discover who God is. .. Jesus holds together the old world and the new, creation and new creation.

True fulfilment is not to be found in the asceticism of Lenten denial of self and the world, but in reverence for Creation, joy in Creation. It is to be found in thriving in this fragile world – where the reality is that it is all fragile, full of disappointment and disease and all manner of disaster. These are the worldly things we can’t escape from, but if we put God first; if we see this life and this world as His gift to us, then we change our perspective on it all. We can’t, by force of will, be Jesus for others, but by living his risen life, in all its fulness, we can allow others to glimpse Jesus through us.

**Amen**