Acts 11: 1-18; Revelation 21: 1-6; John 13: 31-35

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

Looking forward to baptising Jacob and Jessica (not forgetting Andrea) later on this morning, I was thinking what a complete joy it is to have children in the heart of the 9.45 congregation, and what a blessing they are. It would be fabulous if some of you with children were to give the 9.45 service a try one of these days, and just see. They know no boundaries, they have endless capacity for exploration and finding new things, and they find fascination in the smallest of things. And by that they have so much to teach us old ones.

There is one who potters round this building with a watchful parent hovering behind, but his confidence and drive to search out the sights and sounds of St Peter’s is endless; there are the terrible twins, (who aren’t twins at all, but friends and neighbours), who take such joy in the very presence of the other; there’s another one, whom I baptised not long after I arrived – and now he is going to school – and he has two siblings, one of whom will also be baptised quite soon. And there is the South Aisle bunch with their high fives in the recessional hymn. And the ones who bring stuff to the altar rail to show me. And the one whose teddy needs a blessing. And…and…and…

And there is Jacob, who wasn’t talking when I first met him, and now is. And there is Jessica. Who is two different people, one at home and one at church! Pray for them this morning as they come to be baptised. All of them are not, as you know I am fond of saying, the Church of tomorrow; they are the church of today. And we are delighted to have them all in our midst.

So, yes, capacity for exploration, for finding things new and fascinating…..

**Now the dwelling of God is with us, the old order of things has passed away. (***Revelation***)**

Today’s lectionary readings all seem to be about love; a love which changes us and in turn changes the communities we inhabit. We heard just now the gospel, with its new commandment to love as we are loved by God; then in the book of the Acts of the Apostles there is the gift of the Spirit making no distinction between Jew and gentile: hope for all people and not just for a favoured few. And finishes – if we had only heard the other reading from Revelation, with a new heaven and a new earth and the words: Now the dwelling of God is with us, the old order of things has passed away. So I thought I would tell you an old story about the old order of things, transformed by love, and inhabited by the Spirit. It’s about the importance of retaining the child’s perspective really. It goes like this:

In the beginning, before there was anything; before there was time; before space, the Creator made something new. Made it out of nothing. For there was nothing. The Creator made the tiniest, tiny, tiny speck of what seemed like nothing; but out of this speck that seemed like nothing came the beginnings of everything. And the speck of nothingness grew. And grew, and grew, and never stopped growing. And everything was new. So there were new galaxies, new stars, new planets, new mountains, new seas, new rivers, new streams, new land, new trees, new plants, new animals, new people, new .. everything really. Everything was new; each day was a day full of new.

There were exciting discoveries. People could think and speak and love and explore and hope and dream and wish and work and .... And anything was possible, because everything was new ..... And people made homes. And then villages, and towns, and cities.

But then as time passed, people stopped trying new things; rather, they settled for the things they already had. For if they could see it, it felt more secure and somehow safer. Their feet did not go beyond their village and they did not climb up to the top of the mountains. Their eyes did not look up at the sky, and they did not wonder what was beyond what they could see. They forgot about new adventures, and new possibilities. So they became old.

The Creator decided to find out what was the matter, so he visited the people in their homes and in their villages. Before sunset, people gathered in the square. The Creator described a life beyond the horizon and suggested: Do you want me to lead you there, beyond the horizon, beyond what you can see, and you will see new things, you will find how people live in other places? Oh, they answered sadly, it is late, and we're too old to travel to new places ... Then come with me at least to the mountains to look at the world from the top! Gaze down at the wonders beneath your feet. Oh, they said, it is late, we're tired, we have no more energy ...

Then look at the sky, the Creator said them, come and I will tell you about life in the Kingdom you can't yet see! You will see worlds you could never imagine without ever leaving your seat. They answered again: It is late; our minds are too full already, we can't take in more new things .... we can't understand your stories ... People noticed the sun was going down. It is late, they said; it is too late for talking and dreaming, it's time to sleep, and they went to their homes. The Creator shouted after them: People! it is never too late; never too late for exploring and finding and discovering and trying and dreaming and hoping and ....... But they did not turn back and they closed the doors behind them. Then the Creator said: Nothing is too late, for there is no end. I will take away all words of limitation from people: ‘late’, ‘not’, ‘impossible’, ‘far’, ‘high’, ‘hard’, ‘will not’, ‘cannot’, and I will place in their hearts the joy of hope.

My Spirit will lead them. Nothing is too late, because there is no end; there are only new beginnings. The Creator took away all limits and all doubts, and waited for the morning: And as the sun rose above the houses and above the trees; as a new day dawned, would people change their minds, would they grow young and not old, would they go to the mountains and gaze at the stars, and wonder at what might be?

Imagine what might be. Imagine what we might experience, what we might see, what we might discover if we stopped saying ... can't or won't. I wonder what might be in store for us and for this church if we dared to see beyond the horizons we establish for ourselves. To stay young. To retain - or regain – the child’s awe and wonder.

Today’s readings are filled with love: a love which changes us and in turn changes the world we inhabit. They continue in Acts with the gift of the Spirit; hope for all and not just for the favoured few. And are completed by a new heaven and a new earth and the words …. Now the dwelling of God is with us, the old order of things has passed away.

We build a kingdom with love. We build a kingdom with the hope of God’s Spirit within us. We wish it for our children, but we can have it for ourselves. Now the dwelling of God is with **us**; the old order of things has passed away.

**Amen**