

Sunday 21st July 2019
Trinity 5 (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Genesis 18.1-10a
NT: Colossians 1.15-28
G: Luke 10.38-end

I am certain that it can't have escaped your attention that today marks a significant anniversary, one of those "where were you" moments. The 50th Anniversary, of the American astronaut Neil Armstrong becoming the first man to leave the gravity of this earth, to travel to the moon, and at 02.56 GMT on July 21st step on to its surface.

"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" perhaps one of the most famous sentences ever uttered some 19 minutes later Buzz Aldrin joined him becoming the second of only 12 men thus far to have walked on the moon.

The iconic photographs taken on that day have been revisited in recent days as newspapers television and film have replayed the events of that summer of 1969, for those not alive then perhaps you are wondering what all the hype is about. However, if we put the achievement into context the moon landing was achieved using computers with almost a million times less memory than the average smart phone, and most of the 650 million that watched the landing did so through grainy black and white images. Still for those of us alive at that time there was a palpable excitement in the air a feeling that we were embarking on some new era of our human journey

I remember as a teenager the excitement around each and every mission of the Apollo programme although it is true to say that by the time that Eugene Cernan took his last steps on the moon's surface on December 14th, 1972 the public excitement had waned. So far no one has returned to the moon.

Some will argue that the Apollo mission was a waste of money, that the 100billion dollars could have been put to better use or that the NASA space programme was just a diversion

from US foreign policy particularly the Vietnam war which was at its height during this period. Whatever our own thoughts on the merits or otherwise of the Apollo programme, perhaps the greatest achievement of Apollo, was not in the planned missions but in what happened almost by accident and is summed up in the words of astronaut Bill Sanders

Bill Sanders as Lunar Module pilot on Apollo 8 had the job of photographing the moon's surface so that NASA would be able to determine the best site to land on, on Christmas Eve 1968 whilst photographing the surface he became the first person to photograph in colour the Earth rising over the moon's surface his iconic photograph "Earth Rise" was the first colour photograph that captured the beauty of the earth.

"We came all this way to explore the Moon, and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth"

That photograph and the subsequent images captured by the Apollo crews including the 1972 "Blue Marble" are still amongst the most important images ever taken of the earth and are attributed by many to be the arguably some of the most profound images in the history of human culture.

When astronaut William Anders photographed a fragile blue sphere set in dark space peeking over the Moon, it changed our perception of our place in space and it is argued fuelled the environmental awareness movement around the world.

That photo let us see our planet from a great distance for the first time.

The living Earth, surrounded by the darkness of space, appears fragile and vulnerable, with finite resources.

"If you can imagine yourself in a darkened room with only one clearly visible object, a small blue-green sphere about the size of a Christmas-tree ornament, then you can begin to grasp what the Earth looks like from space. I think that all of us subconsciously think that the Earth is flat ... Let me assure you that, rather than a massive giant, it should be thought of as the fragile Christmas-tree ball which we should handle with considerable care".

The words of Astronaut Bill Anders

The legacy of the Apollo programme was not what they found on the moon but what the vision of Earth discovered by the Apollo Astronauts teaches us about it, this space craft that each one of us is strapped into, the life support system without which is cold blackness.

As we think on that, we should remember that each one of us, everyone on earth, every animal and plant, every eco system is intrinsically linked travelling in space at about 67,000 miles per hour around the sun.

Paul's 1st letter to the Colossians paints for us the picture of Christ as the "image of the invisible God" the firstborn of all creation and in that picture of Christ we see the beauty of God's wonderful creation an image of perfection The created world as he intended suspended in the vastness of space. As we hold that image, we need to urgently understand how fragile that creation is and how quickly we as humankind are destroying it.

The human population has doubled in the 50 years since the Earthrise image, resulting in subsequent habitat destruction, the spread of pest species and by climate warming. The impact of plastics on our great seas and the enormous changes to our climates with an increase in the frequency of extreme events such as heatwaves, and vast changes across the oceans and polar caps.

Jesus's words to Martha, the apparent rebuke to her welcome and hospitality point us to where our sole focus should be, listening to Christ the firstborn of all creation.

If we do that then we will see that as Christians we are called to be stewards of creation we are called to continually echo the final words of Revelation "Amen, Come Lord Jesus" and look for the future when Christ will return as he promises but whilst we wait we also need to take action and urgent action to ensure our earth will continue to be a safe home for all its occupants.

Each of us has the power to make a difference to the world, as each one of us has the power to make choices in how we live our lives, how we use scarce resources, how we stop polluting whether that be in the way that we use renewable energy, reduce our dependencies on meat lower our plastic usage, recycle or even just how we drink our coffee here in church

To how we engage with our politicians and call for policies of zero carbon and clean air such as those highlighted by our mayor and council as all parties this week came together to declare a “Climate Emergency

It is our responsibility as the current passengers on earth to ensure we that we never take this God given creation for granted and but to gaze on it each day with a fresh astonishment for its beauty.

The new heaven and the new earth described in Revelation 21 being here on earth , the earth that God created, the earth whose creation the Apollo 8 astronauts described in their Christmas morning broadcast from moon orbit as they read from Genesis chapter 1 1-10 the earth that those astronauts first photographed and the earth that each one of us calls home.

An Earth in perfect harmony, with mankind and God living together with all that damages and pollutes banished to history.

Amongst all the technical accomplishments of the Apollo Mission one simple action of the Lunar Module pilot Buzz Aldrin stands out, it is perhaps little known that as a Christian he took in his personal kit a tiny chalice, a wafer and a container of consecrated wine. In that time between landing on the moon’s surface and stepping onto it, Buzz Aldrin stopped to take bread and wine and in the ordinariness of that action As Aldrin explained ‘symbolising that the Creator God was revealing himself in that moment’

Perhaps it is fitting that as we remember this weekend the events of July 1969, we also in a few moments will join with Buzz Aldrin in that simple act of receiving bread and wine and in

so doing we might also experience in that moment the revelation of the creator God in our world.

The American Poet Archibald-MacLeish writing after the publication of the famous Apollo 17 photograph "Blue Marble" wrote the following

"To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers and sisters on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold – brothers and sisters who know now they are truly family".

May each one of us, through the power of the spirit make that our own experience.

Fr Bill Addy