

OT: Proverbs 8; 1, 22-31

NT: Colossians 1: 15-20

Gp: John 1: 1-14

The most cursory look at any news outlet or social media platform will, I know, fill you with despair about the state of the world and of humanity's role in it. From Ukraine to the Middle East, ominous trends continue to point the world toward global catastrophe. The war in Ukraine and the widespread and growing reliance on nuclear weapons increase the risk of nuclear escalation. China, Russia, and the United States are all spending huge sums to expand or modernize their nuclear arsenals, adding to the ever-present danger of nuclear war through mistake or miscalculation.

In 2023, Earth experienced its hottest year on record, and massive floods, wildfires, and other climate-related disasters affected millions of people around the world. Meanwhile, rapid, and worrisome developments in the life sciences and other disruptive technologies accelerate, while governments make only feeble efforts to control them.

The members of the Atomic Science and Security Board have been deeply worried about the deteriorating state of the world. That is why they have recently set the Doomsday Clock to 90 seconds to midnight—the closest to global catastrophe it has ever been. Writing in the bulletin of Atomic Scientists I quote:

“Today, we once again set the Doomsday Clock at 90 seconds to midnight because humanity continues to face an unprecedented level of danger. Our decision should not be taken as a sign that the international security situation has eased. Instead, leaders and citizens around the world should take this statement as a stark warning and respond urgently, as if today were the most dangerous moment in modern history. Because it may well be”.

Given the current human condition, it is hardly surprising that many people find it increasingly difficult to believe in the love of God in the face of personal and impersonal suffering. When you have come through an experience of watching someone die horribly or have been overwhelmed by the weight of evidence of starvation and brutality from around the world. Or if you look at the world around you, it is not surprising to see the world primarily in terms of the absence of God rather than presence. It is difficult to see signs of an intelligent and loving purpose, rather a completely random and meaningless set of occurrences.

However, I would argue that there are signs of that loving purposeful God all around us if we look for them. I would point you to my Instagram post from Thursday afternoon. A photograph of the fiery, red setting sun over the Mersey, the amazing beauty of creation in a sunset. There are moments such as that when God invites us to delight in his creation, to enjoy with him the world he has made and the people who surround us. Moments when the innocence and joy that was there at the beginning

are restored and we know ourselves to be children of God.

The Sunday lectionary readings do, on the whole, allow us to focus on the central Christian belief that God does all things out of love towards his creation. Even when the readings focus on the suffering of, for example, Paul or the Christian community, this pain is held securely in a circle of belief about its value and meaning. For those who are already so deeply committed to the purposes of God that they see everything, whether good or bad, as part of that, it is sometimes hard to hear the seriousness and indeed the religiousness of this question about God and suffering. Those who ask the question long with passion to see a world in which they could believe in the goodness of God, but they just can't.

Today's readings affirm the goodness of creation and of its God, but they do so in a way that requires us to take religious questioning seriously. And that is because at the heart of what is being said today is the statement that God's creative intelligence has something about it that we should recognize. Proverbs calls it Wisdom, John calls it the Word, and John and Paul, both call it Jesus. Jesus is the language in which the Creator speaks to us, a language which we, at least partly know, and which we can learn if we try.

Proverbs speaks of Wisdom as sharing in making creation habitable for people. As God measures things, as he makes the earth firm and confines the sea, as he creates water and fixes up the sky, there beside him is Wisdom, working with him. Together they plan all the delightful treats they have in store for their new creation. God looks at Wisdom and thinks, 'Soon there will be others to share in this, as Wisdom does.' Wisdom looks at God and thinks, 'Soon there will be others who will understand and love God's wonderful ideas, as I do.'

John, too, describes God's creative work as being shaped in a way that is, in principle, comprehensible to us. God speaks the Word, and the Word is, by definition, a means of communication. Indeed, it is one of the characteristics of human beings. For John, God's whole purpose, from beginning to end, is to communicate with us and allow us to begin to enter into that communication, begin to learn to speak God's Word. But John introduces a cautionary note, which is also bitterly ironic. God speaks to us in a language that we were designed to understand and comes to us in a form that is utterly familiar to us, and yet, some of us still manage not to recognise him. John can only see the stupidity and waste of those who cannot hear when God speaks to them in their own language.

Things are no longer as they were at the beginning, unspoiled, but the Gospel message is that even in our battered world, the light of life and beauty still shines, the darkness has not overcome it. God still delights in the human race, in each one of us.

So, when we call out to God in anger at so much evil and suffering, we are demanding that God explain the world to us, as he himself seems to promise he will, by creation through Wisdom, 'the Word', the image of the invisible God. We are demanding that God be God. God's answer is the

Word, Jesus. It is, in one sense, no answer because it does not take away the suffering and injustice that we cannot bear to see in God's world. But Jesus suggests God's anger and love in the face of suffering. He also suggests a way of living that confronts injustice, that has compassion for suffering, that brings the vitality of God into everything. And he suggests a way of living that might hold, contain and transform evil and suffering.

And it's in the nature of love, in the nature of God, to want to enjoy fellowship with us, to want the very best for us. So, he comes to live among us, to draw us to himself in Jesus. In Jesus we see what God is like in human form, concerned about people's lives and welfare; willing to forgive and heal; always ready to offer a new start with new possibilities opening before us, as it was in the beginning. And if God delights in us then surely it matters to him how we respond? Our response should be to recognise that we are not alone. Jesus, the Word, and Wisdom of God made flesh, is with us.

There is darkness around us: in the damage we have done to our world; in the tragedies and disasters we hear about daily; in our own lives and in the lives of others. But in that darkness a light shines and refuses to be overcome. A light which offers us new hope, new strength, new courage, and new starts.

God delights in us his creation: there is no darkness that can overcome that light.

Fr Bill Addy