

Homily Evensong 15th May 2022

Job 9:1-10, and 1 Peter 2:4-10

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In this joyful Easter season, we continue to celebrate Christ's Resurrection, and we are also here at St Marys celebrating marvellous May.

We are reflecting on the continually astonishing generosity and creativity of God, the Creator and maker of all things, both large and small, and we are thanking God for the blessings shared with us, for us to share with each other. This is entirely in character for a church named St Mary's as the month of May used to be known as a time of particular devotion to Mary, a time of thanksgiving for her example to us of obedience, service and love as the mother of God's son.

We are looking, more than usual, seeing and paying attention to God, present and active, visible and invisible in our lives. We are sharing our resources with our communities, inviting people in. We are planting and making and asking God's blessings on our neighbourhoods and communities and on all the things we do together to sustain and support each other, both those we know and those we don't. We are bringing to God the joys and the pain, the conflict, gun crime and suffering of our world, our fears for the future of our planet, our many different uncertainties and concerns. At the same time, we are remembering that we are also called, to become a part of God's activity in the world as it is, in the ordinary everyday things of life.

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If we think for just a moment of all the ways in which God is described as marvellous, in our reading from Job. Job recognises God as wise in

heart, and mighty in strength. As God who is so powerful that he removes mountains, who turns them over, who shakes the earth out of its place, who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea; who does great things beyond understanding, and marvellous things without number. It is breath-taking to contemplate...

This is a vision of God active on the large scale, who cannot be fully understood, God beyond our imagining so great and so powerful, we can marvel at what God does, wonder at God's power and glory, and be astonished by God's creativity, diversity and generosity. But we cannot contain God, as Mr Tumnus, the faun said of Aslan in the Narnia books when Lucy was afraid of him 'he is not a tame lion', our God is not tame either, we cannot control or domesticate God, only love him, seek to be with him as he seeks us, and to be inspired and led by him.

God it is who says in Revelation 'behold I make all things new' including us, as we are led into marvellous new ways of life and being.

God, though active on a much smaller scale in Psalm 139 still remains powerful beyond our imagination -the psalmist says "it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvellous are your works," all of Creation made by God.

And we are some of those marvellous works of God, we are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, that same light created in Genesis to lighten the darkness by God, who created the light from the darkness, separating them into day and night. As John's gospel reminds us "through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of the

world(men). The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it....”

Our reading from 1 Peter sounds as if we, or least his original readers, possibly both of us, need that or some other reassurance, more than ever. The description of the new young Christians, despite the joy of Resurrection, as having been rejected by other people; perhaps more powerful people is sad. But they are accepted as living stones by Jesus, who is himself The first Living stone to be built with him, into a new temple to God’s glory, a place of sacrifice, prayer and praise and worship. We have become God’s sanctuary. And we too are amongst those called into this new and marvellous way of being with God.

Resurrection life gives us a new way of seeing and understanding God’s presence in the ordinary. Because we have become a chosen people, in the same tradition as the people of Israel, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, in order that we might proclaim, that we might tell others of God’s mighty acts, because we have been called out of darkness into his marvellous light.

In the face of difficult realities suffering and pain God in Christ is also present. When we trust in God, we will, as the writer of 1 Peter tells us ‘never be put to shame’, never abandoned. We have received God’s grace and mercy and become God’s people living, with God present, in all the ordinary things of everyday life.

I have marvelled all this week at the story of Deborah James as she journeys through bowel cancer towards her death, and she is still only 40. I loved and wept with the podcasts she and the others (Lauren and Rachel and then Steve) have made about their journeys with cancer. Jesus said we are to be known by our mutual love, and they are certainly known by theirs.

I wept again when I read what she said on Wednesday. Having tried everything, no longer able to use her arms or legs, knowing there are no further medical options, she is home wanting only to be with her loved ones and held by them, consumed by her tiredness she said 'I am not brave -I am not dignified going towards my death. I am simply a scared girl who is doing something she has no choice in, but I know I am grateful for the life that I have had'.

Since then, she has inspired donations of over £6m for her awareness raising fund and been made a Dame. Deborah is a marvellous lesson in living and dying well, with honesty and sorrow, and above all with gratitude. She could be anyone, she is everywoman. It is a wonderful gift of grace that she has seen her life as a marvellous gift and not as a possession.

She brings into sharp focus for us the profound question in Mary Oliver's poem (Summer Day)

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do,

With your one wild and precious life?

For your great gift, your great and marvellous gift of life, yesterday, today and forever, we give you thanks O God. Amen.