

Trinity 13 Sun 30th August 2015
Rev. Paul Richardson

"God gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we might become a kind of first fruits of his creatures." James 1.18

The word "Creature" is a wonderful word. It conjures up pictures of tiny microbes in a drop of water under a microscope, or those fantastic sea creatures that inhabit the deepest ocean depths. It is the word that Mary Shelley uses of the poor soul-less being that Dr. Frankenstein animates to life. A Gothic novel of the 19th century, remarkably prophetic about the misuse of the new science and technology that was just emerging at that time, which we take so much for granted today.

Waldman the professor of natural history who inspires Victor Frankenstein in his quest to create life says "Scientists have performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens...They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows."

On a chill night of November, Victor finally brings his creation to life. Upon the opening of the creature's "dull yellow eye," Victor feels violently ill, as though he has witnessed a great catastrophe. Though he had selected the creature's parts because he considered them beautiful, the finished man is hideous: he has thin black lips, inhuman eyes, and a sallow skin through which one can see the pulsing work of his muscles, arteries, and veins.

The beauty of Frankenstein's dream disappears, and the reality with which he is confronted fills him with horror and disgust.

Since Frankenstein was written, we have seen so many Frankenstein moments, from the dropping of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima to our present day concerns of global warming as a result of human activity since the dawn of the industrial revolution.

We have sought too much the role of the creator rather than that of the creature.

To recognise ourselves to be a creature is to acknowledge that we and the whole universe have been created...and that behind the whole physical cosmos is something greater than ourselves...a creator God...

We can go back to the very first book of the Bible Genesis to read those stories which contain the reflections on what it means to be part of God's creation from different strands of tradition within the Hebrew people through many ages and through their experience over that time of slavery, liberation, exile and return.

Genesis 1: 26 - 27.

The first two chapters of Genesis have different but complementary views of creature-hood and of our purpose as human beings within God's wonderful creativity, our responsibility for this planet earth which we share with every other living thing, and most amazingly in this infinitely vast cosmos of planets, stars and galaxies --our distinctive quality as individuals and as a community of "people in all times and places" - loved and cherished by God for no other reason that we are his – I have called you by name.. you are mine..(Isaiah 43.1)

This is the importance of theology, it seeks to fathom the reality of what kind of God is the God we worship and what kind of being we human beings truly are called to be.

Unlike Dr Frankenstein who is disgusted by his act of creation, God looks at all that he has made and sees that it is very good.

For St James that creator God is the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change - Ours is a Holy God - God stands apart, to use a phrase from the lovely Compline prayer "from the changes and chances of this fleeting world". Not only is our God one without shadow or darkness, or fallible change, this is a God who has a purpose and who seeks to fulfil it through us, you and me. In this physical world of creation we are God's agents for all that is good and true, the first fruits of his creatures.

That is why for St James we need to "be doers of the word, not merely hearers".

St James epistle is an epistle that urges us to a practical application of our Christian faith caricatured as works rather than faith.. Martin Luther thought St James epistle an "epistle of straw". ..And it is true that our eternal salvation depends not so much on our works as on God's grace, and our faith in Jesus merits rather than our own...but the day to day care of others in need ,, our stewardship of all that God has given us. As we live our daily lives, our responsibility for God's creation, as those who have been given the task of dominion of the earth, does depend on our doing the right thing as well as believing.

To do justly, love mercy and walk humbly as the prophet Micah put it.

There are so many ways in which we can put our faith into action:

The 5 Marks of Mission describe the concerns of God for all the world and the ways in which we can respond to those concerns.

- In proclaiming the Good news of God's love in Jesus...the TELLING
- In the nurturing of new disciples young and old in their Christian journey...the TEACHING
- In caring for those in need through pastoral care and practical assistance...the TENDING
- In addressing the injustices of our worlds structures and the misuse of power by those who have authority...the TRANSFORMING; and
- In being good stewards of this fragile world in which we live...the TREASURING of God's creation.

This coming Tuesday (1st September) has been declared a 'World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation'. This is a call by all the worlds Christian leaders, The Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, The Pope, The Archbishop of Canterbury and the World Lutheran Federation. The Ecumenical Patriarch, The Pope and The Archbishop of Canterbury are encouraging us all to fast and pray on 1st September and indeed on 1st day of every month between now and the big International Climate Change Conference in Paris this December where it is hoped that the world's leaders will take action to seek to halt the ever increasing levels of Carbon Dioxide entering the atmosphere because of our burning of fossil fuels.

Bishop Nicholas is the Church of England spokes-bishop on environmental issues and he has said. "It will do us all good to stop, fast, think and pray about the need to care for God's good but fragile creation. We live at a time when human activity has caused a dramatic reduction in the earth's biodiversity and when people are causing climate change through our profligate use of fossil fuels. A consensus has emerged about the need to move to a low carbon economy.

"Whatever the scientific, economic and political difficulties, at root this is a spiritual problem. Prayer helps clarify what we want and strengthens our determination for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. On 1st September, join the prayer for the care of creation."

One way in which we can put our faith into practice is to respond to this call for fasting and prayer. St John's will be open this coming Tuesday lunchtime from 12.00noon until 1.00 p.m., an opportunity to refrain from lunch in fasting and prayer. There will be a short service of prayer at 12.00 noon followed by a series of readings and silence until 1.00 p.m.

Melvin Matthews a former Director of the Ammerdown Retreat Centre near Bath in his book "Delighting in God" writes about God's original blessing upon creation and our part in ensuring that God's blessing can continue to flow in and through us.

"Once we refuse to allow the original blessing to flow through us, then creation becomes divided , conflict occurs and that which is ordered by love falls into chaos.."

Our concern for the environment is not just a tree huggers love in, it is about a real concern for harmony, peace and justice in all aspects of our world; the plight of refugees and migrants, the raging conflict and war in so many parts of our world, the dehumanising of the poor and vulnerable in our own town as well as at a global level.

Other members of the Anglican Church across the world have pledged their support for praying on the 1st September for climate justice, including the Archbishop of Cape Town and Primate of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, the Most Revd Dr Thabo Makgoba who made the following commitment:

"I fast in solidarity with children who will go to bed hungry tonight because their parents cannot afford the rising prices of food. I fast in solidarity with climate refugees who have lost their homes and livelihoods due to climate change. And I fast in solidarity with people of faith around the world because we know that hope is rising."

This last week Malcom Guite has released some new poems based on the story of the days of creation in the book of Genesis. On the seventh day God rests and contemplates all that has been created.

Blessing and rest, delight in everything
Sustained by your strong love and richly blest
This is the gift you give, the day you bring
Blessing and rest.

This is indeed 'the gladness of the best',
From first lines in the east where linnets sing,
To where the last light lingers in the west,

You lift the cares to which I used to cling,
As you yourself descend to be my guest
And show me how to find in everything
Blessing and rest.