

Sermon on Sunday 4 February 2024

by Geoff Oates, Lay Reader

Lifetime warranty

Proverbs 8. 22: *'When God marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master craftsman'.*

This second Sunday before Lent is widely celebrated as Creation Sunday, and the delightful passage of poetry in Proverbs chapter 8 imagines a personified 'wisdom' as the very first thing God created. It tells how Wisdom works joyfully with God at each stage of a creation process that closely echoes the ancient story we may know from the opening chapters of the book of Genesis.

The poet who wrote this, perhaps around 200BC, cannot possibly have guessed that their words would one day catch the imagination of early Christian teachers, who maybe noticed that word 'master craftsman' and thought of Jesus – the carpenter. Was this a prophetic clue that Christ had not merely been brought into being at the moment in history we call the Incarnation, but had been there from the very beginning? In his Gospel prologue we have just heard, St John replaced the Hebrew 'Hakmah' – Wisdom – with the Greek 'Logos' – the Word. "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him."

Christ was also in there right from the beginning – coeternal with the Father in the theological language of our creeds and some of our old hymns - and taking an active role in the work of

Creation. Just an obscure point of debate for ancient scholars? Or could this idea have something to say to us?

Well, first of all, I really like the idea of Creation being an act of teamwork, a family thing. There is a joy and a dynamism in making things together. In the Gospel narratives, Jesus has another father – Joseph, a carpenter – and Jesus followed his dad into his trade. Father and Son working together in the creative, productive space of a carpenter's workshop. The craftsmanship that made our whole universe became incarnate in the skilled hands of a woodworker.

The role of the carpenter is not just making new things. The workshop is also a place where a worn tool, a broken axle, a damaged plough can be brought to be repaired or refurbished. Not because the materials or the workmanship of the maker have proven to be faulty, but because the craftsman's handiwork is meant to be put to work, to be productive in its turn in field and mill and home. All well-used tools will suffer from wear and tear, and need mending. How much more so if they are not looked after as conscientiously as they should be. I can imagine Joseph the carpenter saying to many of his customers, 'You should have taken more care of this'. Jesus' divine father could say the same to us about so much of His creation, couldn't he?

So, perhaps it is reassuring to know that the father can pass the repair jobs on to his son and say, 'I'll let you fix this one, you know how, because you helped me make it. Give it all your love and care'.

That is what Jesus' divine Father says to us as well. My Son can fix you. Trust him, he helped me make you. In the great workshop of creation, the best person to fix the damage, to make good all the wear and tear of life, is the person who made it all in the first place.

The one who is agent of the redemption for our world, also had a hand in its creation. The one who is agent of your redemption also had a hand in making you.

When you buy yourself something technical and expensive, what do you do with the warranty? That little booklet full of conditions and restrictions that says that, if it breaks down within x years, the manufacturer will mend it, or replace it. Do you file it away carefully until it expires? Or does it go in the recycling? I guess the one warranty we do pay attention to is the one for the motor car. Can you get three years, maybe even five years before you have to start worrying about repair bills?

A long warranty is a great sign that a manufacturer has faith in their products. Faith that they won't break down, or faith that, if anything does go wrong, they will still be worth repairing. It is only a very confident, and very caring supplier who will issue a lifetime warranty.

Our faith teaches that God's creation lives under a lifetime warranty. A warranty from its divine maker who has confidence in what He has made, in partnership with His Son. Not because he is certain



that nothing will go wrong, but because He has faith in His repair and maintenance team.

And that is maybe a very good way to understand redemption. It's not a one-off act, a like for like replacement of faulty goods. It's about sustainability, a lifetime of care and maintenance, for a creation that God believes is worth keeping going – and that includes you and me.

When something breaks down after a couple of years of use, I wonder how often you have hunted down the old instruction manual and tried to find the 'troubleshooting' pages. Then you've noticed the 'care and maintenance' chapter and read with horror about all the things you should have been doing regularly, right from the start, to keep the device clean and well oiled. Maintenance isn't an afterthought to think about when things went wrong.

So, Christ, the Redeemer, the divine maintenance man, wasn't an afterthought to creation, He was there for us right from the start.

There's a big difference between replacing something and renewing it. In what we often call a 'throwaway' culture, there's a lot to be said for what older generations would call 'make do and mend'. You know the old cliché about grandfather's axe? The one that's had seven new handles and five new heads... but grandfather is devoted to it because it has lasted him a whole lifetime. Our God is not into throwaway culture.

God, I trust, will renew me, every part of me, again and again and again, and yet always recognise and cherish me as the same one who first came out of the family workshop 62 years ago. He thinks I'm worth it. He thinks you're worth it. He thinks His whole creation is worth it.