

Sermon on Sunday 7 February 2021

by Geoff Oates

Readings: Colossians 1. 15-20; John 1. 1-5, 10-14

Colossians 1 vs 15 & 16: 'He (Christ) is the first born of all creation, for by him all things in heaven and on earth were made'.

As we move out of the Christmas and Epiphany seasons and into the short space of 'ordinary' time before Lent – just two weeks this year – it's surprising that the wise people who choose our lectionary offer us two rather incarnational – Christmassy – readings, especially St John's prologue, a staple of our Christmas services.

This second Sunday before Lent is widely recognised as Creation Sunday – a fitting theme for a time of new beginnings. But this year the readings focus is on Jesus – Jesus, our Christ - and His part in Creation.

We sometimes try to break up our idea of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, into three clear roles: 1) God the Creator, 2) God the Redeemer and 3) God the Sanctifier, but St John and St Paul are adamant that Christ was also in there right from the beginning. 'By him all things in heaven and on earth were made.' What might this idea have to say to us?

First of all, I 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 had another father – Joseph, the 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 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, and like all well-used tools, they will suffer from wear and tear. And, of course, tools are not all looked after as conscientiously as they should be.

How 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 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 of 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.

We live our lives under a lifetime warranty. A warranty from our divine maker who has confidence in what He has made, together 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 a lifetime of care and maintenance, for a product that God believes is worth keeping going – 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.

I have occasionally heard people tell of how they 'found Jesus' or how Jesus 'came into their lives'. In those moments, when we realised we needed something fixing in our lives, we didn't find him, because he hadn't been hiding! Jesus had actually been in our lives right from the start, right from the moment of our creation, waiting for us to notice Him.

God the Redeemer, God the maintenance man, wasn't an afterthought to creation, He was there for us right from the start. Ready for us as soon as we were ready for him.

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. I think God thinks of me like that.

God, I pray, 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 60 years ago. He thinks I'm worth it. He thinks you're worth it.

