

A Spiritual Barnard Castle!

Proverbs 8^{1,22-31}; Psalm 104^{26-end}; Colossians 1¹⁵⁻²⁰; John 1¹⁻¹⁴

*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory.
[John 1¹⁴]*

Barnard Castle will, for as long as we are alive, be forever associated with sight tests! It may even live in the memory longer than Captain Sir Tom More who is at peace now after surprising himself and our nation when a simple act of physiotherapy turned into philanthropy and captured hearts and imaginations!

I am fairly confident that Covid-19 will have changed how many of us see things. Our relationship with time, with family, with leisure, with Church (perhaps even with God) has all been revised and only a fool would simply do what they did before: e.g. we have learned more about the technology that connects us - Zoom, Teams, etc – and so I will never again spend more time travelling to and from a meeting than I do in it!

Time and again I remind this congregation that we need to keep revisiting our spiritual Barnard Castle, to have that spiritual sight check, and to see things more and more through God's eyes. That is what all the readings do today. Undoubtedly, because there is so much mention of creation, there will be those who will hammer the 'Green Agenda' – all commendable – but there is a higher agenda here.

In any Synagogue, at the front and in line of sight, will be דע לפני מי אתה עומד “*Da Lifne Mi Atah Omed* – Know Before Whom You Stand.” It is that that oozes through the readings, that sense of awe and worship at who God is: to keep that in our spiritual vision gives a sense of perspective (and it isn't 178 miles away and it doesn't break any rules!).

- ✘ Wisdom – arguably, the Old Testament representation of the Holy Spirit - works with God in creating the world, as does Jesus. Can you imagine how much fun they had in working together: how else would you end up with an elephant or a giraffe or a duck-billed platypus or an octopus or making a crab move sideways? How high will we make the sky appear to be (even though it will be thousands of years before humans realise it isn't real)? How deep will we make the sea? When anything could have been made, when anything was possible, this world – trusted to us – is what God's collective sense of serious purpose and frivolous fun arrives at – and all of God was **rejoicing in his**

inhabited world and delighting in the human race. We are given a world and a being and all we have to do is make God smile – if we can manage it, we should make him laugh too!

- ✘ That sense of fun continues in the Psalm – why else mention **that Leviathan** – whose purpose is to **play in the deep**? I get the sense that you get God, Jesus and Wisdom gather round – *look what I can do!* **He looks on the earth and it trembles or he touches the mountains and they smoke!** Of course, there is more serious stuff – **the earth is full of your creatures and all of these look to you to give them their food in due season.** What does God want in response? Singing! **I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will make music to my God while I have my being.**
- ✘ Paul introduces us to Jesus **the firstborn of all creation; all things have been created through him and for him.** Sadly, Paul doesn't have that same sense of fun we find in the Old Testament. Instead we get a reminder of Jesus' divinity: **in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell**; a reminder of Jesus' purpose: **making peace through the blood of his cross**; a reminder of Jesus' role: **he is the head of the body, the Church**; and a reminder of Jesus' status: **in him all things hold together.** This community in God, who knows how to have such fun, becomes serious to act **to reconcile to himself all things**: that includes you and me. God in Christ leaves the party so that we can join it!
- ✘ We just get past Christmass and then the Lectionary gives us again that magisterial reading from John 1. Here is the summary of John's Gospel: **life; light; believe; glory; and truth.** These things are the focus of Jesus' ministry and, when these things are seen in us too, we are beginning to see things through God's eyes. One of the great theological interpretations of John's Gospel is like a great pendulum swing, from the fun and glory of heaven, down to the lowest point of dealing with our sinfulness and then the pendulum swings back up to fun and glory again. That is what awaits us, that is what we need to focus on and that is what God has planned for us.

Da Lifne Mi Atah Omed Know Before Whom You Stand – and know what he expects: laughter, singing, reconciliation and glory. Over Lent you will no doubt be challenged and beaten up (and so you should be), but for now revel in the faith that we share that originates in the playful imagination of God, who does what it takes for us to join the party and helps us focus on what matters.