

Last Sunday evening I was sitting in Trinity Chapel downstairs waiting for the start of our monthly evening service. There was music playing, John Rutter's For the Beauty of the Earth sung by Cambridge Singers. It is a beautiful piece of music. I sitting in the chapel so that I could see the stain glass, and was looking at the middle window which portrays Jesus, and through the clear glass surround it I could look out in the beautiful blue sky behind it – a wonderful autumn evening with lovely light. The I looked to the window to its right, where there is an image of a sheep – and in the clear glass – looking out on to the same lovely autumn evening were grey clouds, darkness and no blue sky!

The windows are less than 3 feet apart, but because of the angle of the curve of that part of the building you can get a totally different perspective of the same evening sky – one of light and blue; one of dark and cloud.

Perspective can come from many things – attitude, mood, location – and sometimes by not moving or changing at all, only to look through a different window.

It was a good thought for me as I came to the end of a day focused on Harvest Thanksgiving and all that God has offered us.

During the service earlier in the day, I had shared a conversation that I had participated in at Laurence's Larder a few days earlier. A young man you I have got to know over the last 2 years had shared with me how for some reason his brain had just stopped his gambling. He has been struggling with this for many years and suddenly 3 weeks ago – he couldn't do it anymore. This has meant he now has more money for food, which he is now buying – though he still comes for lunch at the Larder for company and encouragement. But now his body is reacting – for the first time in 2 years he is drinking less and eating more fruit and he is in real pain. It is a good news story but it is not an easy story – the pain is now inhibiting him from doing anything, and of course, because he has had no permanent address he has no doctor. He was able to go to walk in clinic – but he got 5-10 minutes – and he needs much longer.

I could tell this story in many ways – but like all situations – there is some hope and some disappointment.

The passage from Jeremiah today holds some of this tension of perspective – is all lost or is there hope for the future? The prophets in Jerusalem are preaching that there is hope that things will improve soon. Jeremiah is preaching destruction – God will bring change – but it is not the change that the people are wanting. Jeremiah is pointing out that things are tough, and even as they improve they will still be tough. There is no magic solution in this story, Jeremiah tells them it will take time and they need to be patient, and wait. It is something which humanity is rarely good at, especially parts of humanity which are used to being in power or control.

I often have the privilege to sit with people towards the end of their life, and in this time of reflection I am often struck by what people focus on. Now without making generalisations I have noticed a pattern. Those who have struggled for much of their life for the most part have less difficulty seeing that God has been part of their life, and knowing that God gave them strength when all else seemed helpless or hopeless. Despite all the pain of their life – often when there has been much of it – they have little doubt that God was with them. On the other side – often those who have been successful or lucky with what life has thrown at them, are often more likely to struggle with the fact that God has been with them. Now as I said – there is no hard and fast rule about this, but there is a pattern. A pattern which both Jeremiah, Luke and even to some extent Paul are trying to help us notice today.

Jeremiah is trying to help his audience understand that sometimes the vocation to which we are called will lead us through trials and struggles. Not because God wants it that way but because humanity fights against the peace and wholeness that is possible. As such, while God calls each of us to a journey, humanity and circumstance will often place things in the way of this journey. The challenge of course is to notice what the call of God is, and what is the destruction of humanity?

Which brings us to Luke's account of Jesus healing of the 10 lepers. This story is so often used as a reminder that we should be thankful to God – and so we should. But it is much more than that too. The context of this story takes place in the borders of two countries – a place where those who have no home, or are excluded occupy. Maybe even the refugee, as well of course as the Lepers. As a result people of many nations are located in this space for different reasons – some because of illness or sin, others because they are without a home. It is in this 'no mans land' that Jesus encounters the 10 with Leprosy; one of whom is a Samaritan, who we will remember from other parables were often excluded and not natural friends of Jesus community or circle.

Jesus transforms 10 lives – and touches them in such a way that each of those ten can now leave the border lands and return to their homes and community – and yet only one – the one who is most excluded – the one who has the least – notices that it is God who has transformed his life and allowed him to return to the community. The Samaritan will not return to wealth, or even to a place where he is welcome in Judea – but he can return to his family and village – he can live and work and enjoy life again. He can return from the borderlands.

Jesus in the story is not frightened of entering the borderlands – he knows that it is part of his ministry, part of the journey. Life and faith are not all about smooth sailing. And in entering the borderlands – the places where those who are outcast rest- Jesus transforms the lives of many – including those who are in most need. But also notice in this story the need to acknowledge that God is worthy of praise and that Jesus tells the healed man to get up and get on with it. It is a great moment of

celebration – but the key and gift in this story is the instruction to get up and get on with living!!

One of the elderly residents I visit quite regularly ends every conversation we have, which is often the same conversation about pain and loneliness, with the words – but in the end ‘God is Good’. At first I thought this was platitude – an ignoring of all that is difficulty in their life – but I have since realised that this is not the case – rather it is an acknowledgement that they are not alone and God is with them – even in the midst of all that is confusing and overwhelming – God is still there.

On Tuesday evening here in the space we hosted a Salusbury World event Gulwali Passarlay was interviewed about his book ‘ The lightless Sky’ which is the story of his journey as a child refugee. He is an extraordinary young man who at 21 has seen more horror and hardship than most of us or our families will face in several lifetimes. In all his journey’s he too has not lost sight of God, and continues to pray – it is humanity not God who has created the evil’s of this world. Gulwali knows our modern borderlands well and I was struck by how he too spoke of God with him.

So much of how we survive and live life is about those who supports us, and also the perspective we chose to have as we interpret our life’s journey and our encounters with God. It reminded me of a poem my Dad gave me we I was very small by Mary Stevenson.

*One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.*

*Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.*

*In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.*

*Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,*

*other times there were one set of footprints.*

*This bothered me because I noticed*

*that during the low periods of my life,*

*when I was suffering from*

*anguish, sorrow or defeat,*

*I could see only one set of footprints.*

*So I said to the Lord,*

*"You promised me Lord,*

*that if I followed you,*

*you would walk with me always.*

*But I have noticed that during*

*the most trying periods of my life*

*there have only been one*

*set of footprints in the sand.*

*Why, when I needed you most,*

*you have not been there for me?"*

*The Lord replied,*

*"The times when you have*

*seen only one set of footprints,*

*is when I carried you."*