

Sermon
Saint Peter's Brighton Beach
Pentecost
28th May 2023
'The world is charged with the grandeur of God.'

Let us pray.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
Amen.

Please be seated.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
Gerard Manley Hopkins said.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed.

He could have been writing about autumn in Melbourne.

In today's psalm, as in Judaism as a whole, the Spirit of God, the ruach, a Hebrew word, which in English means literally 'wind', or 'breath', is the source of universal, natural life. What Christianity proclaims today as the third person of the Holy Trinity, God's Spirit is the personal power of God, animating the life of the natural world. And so we read,

'O Lord, how wonderful are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures..
These all look to you
to give them their food in due season.
When you give to them, they gather it up:
when you open your hand,
they are filled with good things..

When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the
face of the earth.’

The Spirit of God is the breath of God, the personal presence of God,
animating the natural universe. So that ‘creation’ may be understood,
as a verb - as the present, continuous action, of God’s Spirit, in the
creation, and renewing, of the whole earth. Day by day, hour by hour,
inch by inch, in all the earth. Leading the psalmist to proclaim, ‘Bless
the Lord, O my soul, O Lord my God you are very great.’

From the beginning, the Jewish people proclaimed the grandeur, the
greatness of God, in the natural world, in the power of the spirit. Open
your bible, and you will see it:

‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, and the
earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,
while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God
said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the
light was good...And there was evening, and there was morning, the
first day’.

Not only is the Spirit the source of the natural world, but of the human
natural world. Turn the page of your bible, and you will see it:

‘Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a
living being’.

Thus far we have seen that already the Jewish people proclaimed the
Spirit to be the source of life: the power of the natural world, the
creator and sustainer of this mortal life. So what is ‘new’ about the
New Testament proclamation of the Holy Spirit, the third person of
the Trinity? What do we find when we turn the pages of our bible, a
little further.

In the New Testament, we see that the Holy Spirit is present to the world now, bringing eternal life. So that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are lifted up, outside of themselves, to participate in the eternal life of Jesus Christ, the new Adam. The first fruit, of God's new creation of all things. By the transfiguration of this world of mortal life, into a world of eternal life. The same eternal life, the same glorified, resurrected life, that Jesus now experiences. The resurrection of Jesus, is the hope of the world. In him, the future destiny of the human race, has come. The future of the human race, has come. It is here, for all to see. Who have the eyes to see, and the ears to hear, what God has prepared, for all who love him.

In Acts the Spirit of God has come upon the Christian Church, in a new way, 'When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.'

In Corinthians, the Spirit of God now animates the Christian Church, the new creation of the world, the new humanity, made new, by the power of the Spirit, of eternal life. Made whole, made one, by the power of that same Spirit. And sent by God, into the world, as a witness to the good news of the kingdom of God now dawned in Jesus Christ. In a unity, and a reconciliation, that is a sign in the world, of the future unity, the final redemption, of the human race, and creation itself, when the kingdom of God comes a final time, at Christ's return, to make all things new.

In the Gospel of John we read that Jesus came into his own home. Into his world, that God the Father made through Him, the Son. Into this world that is charged with the holy Spirit. Not to condemn the world, but to transform it, from this mortal life, into eternal life.

By the Son and the Spirit, then, the two hands of God the Father, the God who is Holy Trinity, is gathering up all things, in heaven and on earth, to himself. Reconciling all things, in heaven and on earth, to himself. Uniting all things, in heaven and on earth, to himself.

And all of this, in fulfilment of, as a foretaste of, as an anticipation of, that day of God, when, at Christ's return, God will make all things new. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more; for the first things, that is, this mortal world, will have passed away. And the last things, that is, God's new creation of the world, God's new heaven and new earth, the Kingdom of God, that Jesus came proclaiming, shall be all in all.

The Easter proclamation is the meaning of all life on earth, and the hope of the world. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the new day has dawned. The first fruit, is here.

The resurrection is the fulfilment of all reality, the fulfilment of all of history, a history understood, as a unity, as a work in progress, as awaiting fulfilment.

You see, the resurrection of Jesus, and the general resurrection, are a 'single event'. A unity.

'But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.'

In Jesus Christ, the resurrected Son of God, the end of the world, the end of history, has come. In Jesus Christ, the Messiah of God, his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven to reign, at the right hand of God the Father, with all authority in heaven and on earth subject to him, the future kingdom of God himself, has dawned upon the world. It is not yet the fulness of the day. But the day has dawned. The end is here. The future destiny of all things is here, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The new Adam. The first fruits, of the new creation of the world.

‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent, and believe in the good news,’ was Jesus proclamation. And it is the proclamation, of the Christian Church. The proclamation, of every follower of Jesus. The Christian vocation, the fulfilment of Christian baptism: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.’

Lit by the not yet of the future kingdom of God, not only the church, but the world too, is who, and what it will be, that is who, and what God created it to be: the children of God (Romans 8).

So that the Christian proclamation of the future kingdom of God, bestows unfathomable meaning, an indefatigable dignity, unextinguished by suffering, upon the human race, and upon creation itself (Romans 8), in the midst of its suffering, its groaning, under the weight of perishability.

We are not yet. But we are, all of us, who we will be, in the future kingdom of God: the children of God.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.