

SERMON: 27 October 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper
“Humble Glory”
(Psalm 33:1-9 and Revelation 4:1-11)

Our Psalm today declares that:

... the word of the Lord is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.

The Lord loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

(Psalm 33:4-6)

The word of the Lord is a person not a rule book. The word of the Lord is revealed to us in Jesus, the Christ, anointed with the Spirit of God.

As Paul puts it, Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God. Through Christ all things are made.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.

The word of the Lord shows us that the nature of God is dynamic, creative, energetic, full of life, organic, growing, thriving, evolving, developing, self healing and renewing.

And the Book of Revelation assures us that God the Creator will renew all of creation in the end.

I think today's readings pose some fundamental human questions. How do we begin to see the mystery of God? Where do we put ourselves? Where do we put our time and energy?

In the vision of Christ that the disciple John is having I think we can glean at least a bit of an answer that might help us.

Despite being locked in prison for his faith, John has positioned himself in a place of worship. He has drawn aside and finds himself overwhelmed by the goodness of God. Despite the locked doors he's behind, he sees an open door in heaven.

John sees that God's throne is "the ultimate reality behind all earthly appearances" and that "God's sovereignty is the "true reality which must in the end prevail on earth". (Oxford Commentary, p.1292)

John is in the Spirit and God is speaking from within him, revealing to him truth that he can't see in his natural circumstances. He's only able to see the mystery of God because he is in the Spirit. The Spirit of God enables people to see glory and to see things gloriously, to see beyond current circumstances and see what matters or what will be or what can be; to see the possibilities of a new beginning or to discover the hope that there is a day coming when everything is going to be alright.

[I want to say to those who are struggling with something at the moment that "It's ok not to be ok. It won't always be like this."]

Which reminds me of a quote from Jean Vanier that I meant to share last week.

[SLIDE] "When we love and respect people, revealing to them their true value, they can begin to come from behind the walls that protect them".

[SLIDE]

Maybe worship is more important than we sometimes think? Maybe there's something mysterious going on that we can't always see or understand.

Which begs the question, what is worship? We know it's about giving worth to another, especially to God, but isn't all of life potentially lived as worship? If it's about giving worth to God then our attitude to worship reveals how much we think God is worth. If we think God is worth giving everything to then we might find it easy to worship God. But if we're struggling to worship, maybe we need to reflect on how much we think God is worth.

Everything we do can be done in an attitude of worship. We can work as if we're using our work to give glory and thanks to God. And we can play with that same attitude. I think that's how life is meant to be lived. In the Spirit isn't something to be expected just on Sundays.

And notice that being in the Spirit is not something that John switches on and off. He doesn't seem to have that degree of control. All he's done is put himself in the place of worship, or the attitude of worship. Maybe he began simply by thanking God for things and things developed from there and he begins to see deeper into the glorious mystery of it all. That's often how prayer works I think. We might begin in silence or with a word of thanks and discover we can go deeper in. We might even encounter the heavenly places as citizens of heaven.

And what is it that John sees going on in this mysterious heaven? It's worship. The four living creatures and the 24 elders never stop worshipping the Lord God almighty; acknowledging God as Creator and Sustainer of all things, the One who always was, who is, and who is still to come.

I think there's an important work of communion in John's vision of heaven symbolised by the bringing together of the 7 lamp stands, the 7 spirits of God. The Kingdom of Heaven is about building peace and unity. It's about oneness in God. The day is coming when our differences will be over and the church will be brought together as the Bride of Christ, dressed and ready for the wedding feast of the Lamb.

We are an outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven. As we saw last week we are a place where the love of God can be discovered in our communion together, where outcasts are brought near, where no one is a stranger, where foreigners are welcomed, enemies loved and where sinners find forgiveness.

It's an idea as old as the hills, yet as radical as ever. It's a vision that's worth giving our time and energy to in every way we can. And on this day where we celebrate the sacrament or the mystery of our communion, may we see all things in the Spirit of Christ, the perfect expression of unconditional love which sends us out and holds us together.