

2023-02-05 ... 10am Morning Worship Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Genesis 1:1 – 2:3; Romans 8: 18-25; Matthew 6: 25 – end

'Have you ever been drawn to something and not known why? Maybe it's what it means when we say something speaks to us. Because what truly speaks to us is the voice whispering into our souls.'

From the current Peugeot 408 advert ... we'll come back to that!

Three major passages of scripture this morning. So many things we could pause to think about.

One of the things that I think they have in common is that they were all written or said as assurance or reassurance to the believer.

In the Creation story of Genesis 1 God is seen to bring order out of nothing, or out of a brooding rather spooky darkness and that order is constructed so that Adam and Eve have food provided and a responsibility towards all that God has created. And God said that what had been made was good.

In Romans Paul describes creation as groaning and suffering labour pains. It seems that there is something greater than being good in store for creation as well as humankind. And creation is waiting for its fulfilment on us who are waiting for the time when Jesus will come again. Paul says that when that glory is revealed to us we will completely forget our present sufferings which will seem insignificant in that new light.

So God made a safe place for us and God promises us somewhere even better.

And Matthew records Jesus telling us not to worry because God has all the important things in hand.

Paul speaks of the believer's hope, a hope in something we can't see – but as he says, if we knew exactly what we are waiting for then it wouldn't be hope.

Jesus seems to be trying to make that hope more concrete. Why should we worry about what we will eat when we can see that God feeds the birds, why should we worry about what we will wear when we see how beautiful the wild flowers are.

For me, being able to live in the light of hope is God's great gift to the believer.

If someone, having heard about God, were to choose to live a life of sin in the belief that that would mean the best life, but with the intention of seeking forgiveness at the last possible moment to claim an eternal place in the kingdom of heaven, the thing that they would miss out on, in my opinion, would be the peace brought by the hope that God was, and is and ever will be in love with us.

When we slow down our reading of the Gospel passage we will see that we can pick some holes in it, that it's a rather grandiose statement – actually we do need to think about what we're going to eat and what we're going to wear. Yes, there are berries and seeds for the birds to eat but they can die from cold or be killed by a predator. The lilies of the field look lovely but they don't last very long. Sometimes we need to keep our worrying to what's going to happen today but in practice never planning forward at all would be disastrous.

Although the phrase we hear most out of this passage is Don't Worry, the verse we are actually supposed to be paying attention to is **verse 33**. I'm rather glad that Richard didn't choose for us to sing 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God' this morning because I was very struck by the wording used in our translation – **STRIVE** - strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

We have a job of work to do. Confident in all that God has done for us, is doing for us and will do for us, we should look out beyond ourselves. Never mind whether we're going to have jacket or roast potatoes for tea, have we checked that our neighbour has got food for their table? Never mind whether or not we've got a new outfit for the party we're going to, has our neighbour got shoes?

Striving for the kingdom of God and his righteousness; holy living; loving God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength and your neighbour as yourself – these all describe the way we put ourselves in a right relationship with God, into the quality of relationship which leaves us confident that God will fulfil the promises he has made to us.

And I feel I should remind us that this way of living is for the hard times as well as when all is going well. I don't say that lightly but I do say it without really knowing how you do that. My bad times seem nothing compared to what others are dealing with. But I lean on Emmanuel, God is with us, and remember my prayers which have been answered. I value our intercessions so much more now than I did when I was younger – so much trouble, so much trauma, such a feeling of powerlessness – but not, I pray, hopelessness.

When I look back on my journey to faith I am aware that my path crossed every now and then with those of peers who were Christians. I always thought there was something special about them, special in their graciousness which I found a really appealing quality and I was drawn just a little nearer to God because of their influence.

I want to take us back to those advertising words that I started with ...

'Have you ever been drawn to something and not known why? Maybe it's what it means when we say something speaks to us. Because what truly speaks to us is the voice whispering into our souls'.

When it is on earth as it is in heaven, it won't be a car that those words are spoken about.