

Trinity Sunday, 16th June 2019.

Canongate Kirk.

Psalm 8: 3 *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

This Psalm has been described as “one of the most inspiring in the whole of the Psalter” and it rather comes to my rescue this Trinity Sunday, which is generally reckoned by preachers to be one of the most challenging in the whole of the Calendar. Certainly the doctrine of The Holy Trinity is not necessarily the easiest to explain or to understand and that is as true for the preacher as it is for the congregation. How to unfold this great mystery? That is the challenge we encounter every year on this first Sunday after Pentecost when we marked, as we did last week, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the fitting in of the last piece as it were in the theological jigsaw, the completion of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though written centuries before the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, there is perhaps a sense in which Psalm 8 can help to explain it, not least by bridging the gap between the God who created the heavens and set the moon and the stars on their course, and the human beings, the mortals, the men and women and children of whom against all expectation this great creator God is still mindful, still careful. *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*

Every bit as poetic as the psalms is the work of the First World War poet, TP Cameron Wilson, whose poem “Magpies in Picardy” eloquently describes the same combination of the vastness of God in nature and at the same time his concern for the character of his creatures.

*He said that still through chaos works on the ancient plan,
And two things have altered not since first the world began,
The beauty of the wild green earth and the bravery of man.*

It is a conundrum that itself has caught the imagination of writers and poets and painters since first the world began. *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?* Or as John Bell puts it in his modern translation for the hymnbook:

*When I look up and see the stars which your own fingers made,
And wonder at the moon and stars, each perfectly displayed;
Then I must ask, “Why do you care? Why love humanity?
And why keep every mortal name fixed in your memory?”*

In our Gospel reading Jesus said “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...” and the truth is surely that for a while it was Jesus himself who bridged that gap between heaven and earth, between heaven and humanity, Father and Son, but that down through the centuries we would need the Holy Spirit to keep the connection alive, to bridge the gap between what is seen and unseen, between what is mortal and what is eternal, and to know that by the power of the Holy Spirit God is still mindful, still caring, still ready to welcome each and every child into the worldwide family of his Church. *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?* In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.