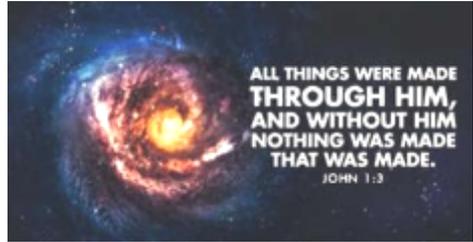


Sunday 4th February 2018

The Second Sunday before Lent

Sexagesima

White



Collect

Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth and made us in your own image: teach us to discern your hand in all your works and your likeness in all your children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things, now and for ever. **Amen**

Colossians 1:15-20 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Pre-eminence of Christ

1¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
1¹⁶ For by^[a] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 1¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 1¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. 1¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 2²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Footnotes:

a. That is, by means of; or *in*.

COMMENT: Colossians 1:15-20, is a beautiful poem used by Paul in the church at Colossae. It's possible that this was not only a masterful piece of prose, but that it might also have been a hymn sung by the Colossians, a small band of believers struggling to find their place as a new sect in the midst of a culture that was potentially dangerous for the young church. Paul was probably using this Christological hymn to offset several threats. Colossae was a cosmopolitan center of religion, trade and culture. The Colossian Christians were confronted with Mid-Eastern astrology, lingering Jewish traditions, a plethora of Greek gods and goddesses, and a Roman empire that impacted everyone. It appears that these prevailing ideologies and religions were influencing a set of teachers in this New

Testament church. These false teachers were advocating for beliefs and practices that were not a part of the apostles' original Gospel.

John 1:1-14 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Word Became Flesh

1¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2²He was in the beginning with God. 3³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4⁴In him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of men. 5⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

9⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11¹¹He came to his own,^[b] and his own people^[c] did not receive him. 12¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Footnotes: a. or was not any thing made. That which has been made was life in him. b. Greek *to his own things*; that is, to his own domain, or to his own people. c. *People* is implied in Greek.

COMMENT: One must wonder if the choice of reading for the Gospel has been misplaced here. The reading for Christmas Day features this well known passage. However the theme is creation and new creation. The threefold utterance in John 1:1 carries us into the depths of eternity, before time or creatures existed. Genesis and John both start from 'the beginning,' but, while Genesis works downwards from that point and tells what followed, John works upwards and tells what preceded – if we may use that term in speaking of what lies beyond time. Time and creatures came into being, and, when they began, the Word 'was.' Surely no form of speech could more emphatically declare absolute, uncreated being, outside the limits of time. Even the 'fall' is in the mind of the author, but it is a darkness that the coming of the Word has conquered. Whilst Matthew and Luke state the Virgin birth clearly, it is not absent from John. Given the right to become children of God, is a right by adoption, by the will of God. In contrast it is the Father's Son, who is 'μὴ ἑστῶτος' – monogenēs – only begotten, or only born, from the Father. Akin to the adopted sons and daughters, Jesus' birth was not of blood

nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God, but unlike those who come to faith in Christ, it is not by adoption but by direct generation. It is a true filial relationship. This phrase ‘only begotten’ is stressed in John 3:16 & 18. John will be aware of the tradition of the Virgin Birth – but what he has chosen to do, is to state that those who receive Christ, and who believed in his name, are like Jesus, sons and daughters of God, and that a kindred miracle to that which begat the Son of God, as the only begotten, will give us the new birth of adoption, to make us, sons and daughters of God – part of the new creation of God.

Psalm 104: 24-35 *Quam multa sunt opera tua Domine* Grail Psalter

℟ Send forth your spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth.

²⁴ How many are your works, O Lord!

In wisdom you have made them all.

The earth is full of your riches. ℟

²⁵ There is the sea, vast and wide,
with its moving swarms past counting,
living things great and small.

²⁶ The ships are moving there
and the monsters you made to play with. ℟

²⁷ All of these look to you
to give them their food in due season.

²⁸ You give it, they gather it up:
you open your hand, they have their fill. ℟

²⁹ You hide your face, they are dismayed;
you take back your spirit, they die,
returning to the dust from which they came.

³⁰ You send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the earth. ℟

³¹ May the glory of the Lord last for ever!

May the Lord rejoice in his works!

³² He looks on the earth and it trembles;
the mountains send forth smoke at his touch. ℟

³³ I will sing to the Lord all my life,
make music to my God while I live.

³⁴ May my thoughts be pleasing to him.

I find my joy in the Lord. ℟

³⁵ Let sinners vanish from the earth
and the wicked exist no more.

Bless the Lord, my soul.

✠ Send forth your spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,**

**As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This whole of this psalm celebrates God's providential works in creation and the natural environment. This latter portion of it emphasises the life-giving and life-sustaining gift of spirit without which no creature can exist (verse 30). Scientists in our day may or may not hold a hypothesis about the origins of the universe which includes a divine act of creation. Yet as more the mysteries of the universe are revealed, many are forced to conclude that a spiritual initiative lies beyond the beginning science now describes as the Big Bang. Was it just happenstance that triggered the evolutionary process 14 billion years ago? Knowing nothing that could be now regarded as 'science,' but with deep faith, the psalmist had penetrated these same mysteries and concluded that he was observing Ultimate Reality. His meditation on what he saw around him drove him to make this faith statement and to offer praise to God for what he saw. Who then are the 'sinners' whom the psalmist wishes to be "vanished from the earth?" (verse 35) Could these be understood in our time to be everyone who helps to destroy and exploit for their own wealth the very environment which is the sacred creation of God's Spirit, and refuse to acknowledge our creator?

Post Communion

God our creator, by your gift the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise, and the bread of life at the heart of your Church: may we who have been nourished at your table on earth be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross and enjoy the delights of eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ the Son of God, born of Mary, fill you with his grace to trust his promises and obey his will; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**