

Creating

Genesis 1:1-5; Matthew 28:16-20

I received an email the other week from someone who wanted to come and visit the Church to see a window they thought had been dedicated to a family member in the early part of the C20th. The person wanted to come and see the window, which is still here, before the Church was sold, as they had heard.

I couldn't think of a better time to invite anyone to this Church than this weekend, with the Morningside Hope Dementia Concert, with umbrellas inside and out, with the beautiful woollen panels on the pillars, and flower displays; with the jam, baking and making stall, with face-painting and Noah's Ark in an umbrella, and a hungry caterpillar, and a multi-coloured cow, and a fire-engine. People making and baking and shaping and knitting Oh, and a couple of Sunday services with lovely music and encouraging words.

We might have our challenges to face in the months ahead, like all God's Churches, but I don't quite think we're ready to put this building on the market quite yet!

The level of creativity that we see around us today, inside and outside the Church, is astonishing. It points not only to imagination and skill, but also commitment and a decision that these are things that we wish to do and make because in the doing and making we reveal something about ourselves: what we like, who we are, what we have been taught, what we want to share, how we want to be involved, and maybe even what matters to us, not just the thing made, but the good cause being supported. This is something for which we should be thankful. Creativity is a gift from God to us, and each of us has it in so many different ways.

When I was in London a month ago I visited one of my favourite places. Right beside the National Gallery is the National Portrait Gallery. It was founded in the C19th, and as you go around looking at the portraits of the famous, and you can do the same at the equally wonderful Scottish Portrait Gallery on Queen Street, you look at the portraits and what lies beyond the pose.

A clerical colleague has a similar take on this. He wonders how you would like to be caught in a lasting portrait for the gallery?ⁱ What picture do you have of yourself that you would like others to see? Do you think that picture you have of yourself ties up at all with the picture others have of you? How old would you be in this portrait? Where would you be? What would you be doing? What emotion, position, look would just capture you? What would you like the picture to say about you - 'I'm essentially happy', 'I'm rather serious', 'I used to be thin', 'I love my garden'? What would you want to it to hide - 'I've got big ears', 'I'm lonely, 'I'm ill'? Would the portrait be incomplete if someone wasn't with you in the portrait? Or would it look at how you are without them? What colours would you want around? Where would the shading be? And then, when you have got this picture just right, would your friends recognize you in it? Would your work colleagues? Would the one you love most? What about those you don't get on with? How painful will it be to hand that picture over to the gallery and know that it will outlive you and that there will be so many things not said in it, thoughts, experiences, feelings not expressed there? After all this you'll understand why Winston Churchill said he preferred painting landscapes because a tree never complained that he hadn't done it justice. We can spend our lives so desperate to be looked at and yet be so terrified of being seen.

Today is Trinity Sunday, where we try to get our heads around the character of God which is endlessly urgent in the church, and enduringly one of the most difficult to comprehend. In truth, what the portrait of God as Trinity reveals as much about us as it does about God.

We see that we are created, willed into being, wanted. Our life is a gift. Our life is an act of reckless generosity to which we are asked to respond with our love and gratitude. We can portray God as the Creator Father or Mother, Who loves us until it hurts, allows us freedom even if we walk away, suffers when His relationship with us is damaged, and continues to shape the world so that we might feel ourselves drawn once more into His love. It's an intimate, not distant portrait of how we look at God

God has a body language known as Jesus Christ. Jesus is the image of how God wants to engage with us, and how we might engage with God. As we see how much God the Father loves Jesus, we find another intimate portrait about how God has chosen to love us.

The last part of the divine portrait shows us that God breathes. God the Holy Spirit lives in us and creates community to grow and love in. No matter how weak, inadequate, uncertain we might be the Spirit breathes courage and inspiration into us, and we are surprised by the times when we achieve more than we thought was ever going to be possible.

God creating. God in body and love. God breathing. Might that help give us something to hold on to this Trinity Sunday? In this picture of God, might we dare see pictures of ourselves, as we create, as we are in body and love, and as we breathe? It's a portrait about being, but it is also a portrait about doing. It shows us that what we believe relates directly to how we act, and we keep working at it, just God keeps working with us.

The Creation poems in the Book of Genesis were written over 2,500 years ago, not as a scientific text book of how things were made, but about why they were made. God's Spirit, sweeping over the formless void and chaos, hears a word to embody a world in which the life we know around us is called into being. The first words uttered are, "*Let there be light*", and the shaping of night and day begins, and the poetry of creation moves on from there. The story about Creator God is

not about *how* God created the world by *why* God created the world. The reason: God loves humanity, and the rest of the created order. God's speciality is loving and caring for all creation. We see the world, "*charged with the grandeur of God.*"ⁱⁱ

To what extent does the massive effort of this festival provide a portrait of the Church, and God's people within it? To what extend does the rest of the year and all the hundreds of other things that we do provide a portrait of the Church, and God's people within it? Do we like what we see? Do people outside recognise that here are people, and here in this place is something that is worthwhile and good. Something worth nurturing and cherishing. Something worth supporting and sharing. Something worth passing on to the generations to come. A roof no longer leaking. A new way of decorating the sanctuary from time to time not with umbrellas but with other images of things that matter to our good work here, and our faith here. Angels at Christmas; images of food at harvest; doves or flames of fire next Pentecost; stars and sun and moon when globes when we give thanks for the earth; poppies at Remembrance. Has our Creator God given us new ways to embody what we do and breathing new possibilities about how we might develop and grow in the time that lies ahead of us?

And if I turn briefly to the Matthew reading where we find Jesus giving His great commandment to His followers to go out and baptise and share the good news in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, might we also catch a further image of what our faith in Jesus enables and calls us to do. Not to keep who we are and what we do a secret, not that we've ever really done that in the past, but to show the outside what the inside of this Church, and you people of the Church, to a world that needs to hear about hope and forgiveness, healing and joy, welcome and inclusion, faith and love?

In portraits of the inside and outside of this Church and its Christian people, we might still offer to our community not just what a church might look like, and its people, but what a world might look like. Filled with colour and texture and nourishment. Filled with sound and silence. Filled with peace and reflection. Filled with laughter and tears. Filled with people. Filled with God.

Trinity Sunday. Let's scotch rumours about the Church being sold. Not with all of this going on. Not with all of us going on. Not with all of God at work: creating, in person, and breathing.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ Mark Oakley, *Way of the Heart*, p81

ⁱⁱ Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur'