

Address: Clergy Summer Gathering: Worship and Time: Then and Now

Then God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light.....And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. *Genesis 1.3, 5.*

'See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

Revelation 22: 12, 13

Two references to time from the first and last chapters of our Bible. And there is much scriptural reflection on time in between those two passages. What I want to do this afternoon is to reflect on how this Scriptural emphasis on time is reflected in Christian worship.

It was, *in the fullness of time*, says St Paul to the Galatians (Galatians 4.4), that God sent his Son. I don't know whether you saw the 'Out of the question' page of the *Church Times* last week; the question was about the timing of the coming of Jesus. Of course, we affirm as Christians that the coming of the Son of God into the world two thousand years ago was not random, in the sense that any old time, any old year, would do; it was according to God's exact plan and purpose. Indeed, the noun 'fullness' carries the image of filling a container – when it was entirely filled, as it were, God sent forth his Son. The coming of Jesus is set in the context of the narrative of God's dealings with Israel, the self-revealing of God, of his Name and character, of a developing sense of God 'coming to dwell' among his people in tabernacle and Temple, foreshadowing a yet more perfect visitation, of the hope of a promised Messiah, a new David, an idealized King; - so that in Christ these hopes find their fulfilment and consummation, in the context of the kind of things mentioned in the *Church Times* answers, the rise of the Roman Empire, of communications and travel routes, and a Graeco-Roman civilisation into which the Gospel would be pitched both in-culturally and counter-culturally.

The coming of the Christ is therefore *the* decisive moment; the time of God's visitation, not by prophet, angel or seer, but in the person of his only Son; the great mystery of God incarnate, a full disclosure in flesh and blood of the nature and name of God. The Christ-like God, who leads us to the Father; the human face of God, in which we behold God's mercy and loving-kindness.

This critical intervention into human history changes the nature of time, as we recognise in our calendar: BC, 'before Christ' and AD, 'in the year of our Lord'. And this is where I want to make my first main point. But before I do, I had a little 'awareness' moment during the General Synod debates on *Times and Seasons*. It concerned the form of intercession for the Eucharist of Christmas night; you may know the text...

Father, in this holy night, your Son our Saviour was born in human flesh....

In this holy night, Mary, in the pain of labour, brought your Son to birth..., etc.

The member of Synod said he had two objections. First, the New Testament doesn't say that Jesus was born 'during the night'. Second; it all happened 2,000 years ago- so why are we pretending it is happening now?

Now this is a serious question of perception for some members of our Church; and it's around matters of exegesis and logic. With regard to night, well, yes, the shepherds were watching their flocks by night – but more significant, I think, is the metaphor of night: Isaiah 9, 'the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light'; John 1, 'the true Light, that lightens everyone, was coming into the world'; Luke 2, 'a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel'. This is what stimulates the Church's liturgical imagination, making the celebration of Christ's birth 'at night' symbolically appropriate and resonant. And then there are issues of theology. Is the Incarnation merely an isolated historical event? Or, is it an eternal moment, and eternal movement, in the history of God? In time, we seek to give expression to eternal realities.

It seems to me that the Incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, are not merely matters of history, because Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection hold within themselves God's eternal redemptive purposes. Also, the assuming of our human nature by the Son of God was not partial or temporary, but total and eternal. One of my favourite Christmas prayers is by the great writer Eric Milner-Whit, who states this truth beautifully:

To you, O Christ, Word of the Father,
we offer our lowly prayers and humble thanks;
for love of the human race
you most wonderfully chose to be made man,
and to take our nature *as nevermore to lay it by*;
that we might be born again by your Spirit,
and restored to the image of God...

As nevermore to lay it by.

This is why the Church has developed in liturgy this concept of *active* remembrance. You will be aware that liturgical scholars have in recent years interpreted the Greek word *anamnesis* against the background of Jewish spirituality. The Passover has been critical here, and particular an ancient passage in the Haggadah called *Gamaliel's Constitution*:

In every generation, let each one regard himself as if he had come up out of Egypt himself...It was not just our fathers that God the holy one redeemed, but ourselves too, along with them...He led us out of captivity into freedom, from sorrow to joy, from struggle to festivity, from darkness into great light, and from slavery into liberation. Therefore let us sing before him: Hallelu-Yah.

This is a spirituality in which an act of historical redemption is made a present reality. It is about a conviction that God's people are free, whatever their outward circumstances; that past events of salvation have present and eternal significance. When we remember the Cross at Holy Communion – it is as if we are at the Cross, as we receive now, today, all the benefits that flow from Christ's sacrifice. This is what led both John Calvin and Charles Wesley to use the phrase Christ's '*eternal* sacrifice'. Indeed, just as Passover embraces the past, present and future: a past act of redemption under Moses, a present experience of liberation through active remembrance, and a future hope as it was believed that the Messiah would come on Passover Night – so the Eucharist also embraces these movements, a past act of salvation through the Cross, a present encounter with the risen Christ, and a future hope – *until he comes* (1 Cor. 11. 26), the messianic banquet:

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

So, when each year we make the anamnesis of Christmas, we are not pretending, but recognising that the Incarnation itself transcends history.

It is the same with the proclamation of the word. The Gospels, written 2,000 years ago, become for us contemporary words of Christ. Hence, the Gospel acclamations. Compare *ASB* in the 3rd person:

Glory to Christ our Saviour.
Praise to Christ our Lord...

with the direct address of *Common Worship*:

Glory to you, O Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Here is a much more *dynamic* understanding of the presence of the risen Christ in the Christian assembly, so that his words and deeds, wrought and spoken once in time, become living words and deeds, by the anamnestic proclamation of the Gospel.

It is the same in Baptism. In Romans 6, Paul presents this sense of mystical incorporation in Christ through baptism. Christ inaugurates the new creation through his death and resurrection, overcoming the old order of sin and death. Through faith and baptism, Christ's story becomes our story. We die with him and are buried with him, and are raised to life with him so that we might walk in newness of life. Which is why when we celebrate Easter, we are not simply commemorating what happened way back then; but precisely because Christ's story, has become our story, we ourselves are involved in those saving events. It is about him and us-in-him.

If you are uncomfortable with the concept of *anamnesis*, we can also consider a pneumatological approach. In Johannine theology, it is the paraclete who takes what is Christ's and reveals it to us (John 16.14); who brings all things to our remembrance (John 14.26). The Spirit, who unites heaven and earth, who works through time and eternity, re-applies what has been wrought in Christ to make it fruitful and real today.

Let me now move on to look at some other aspects of worship and time.

1. The Calendar

At the Reformation, a point of continuity with the pre-Reformation Church was the preservation of the Calendar in the Church of England. This to me is an example of Dr Cranmer's theological insight. We can simply mark out the weeks of the year by date; so next Sunday would be Sunday 5th July. Or, we can give the weeks their liturgical names:

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
The First Sunday of Advent
The Second Sunday of Christmas
The Third Sunday of the Epiphany
The Second Sunday of Lent
The Seventh Sunday of Easter.

In other words, time is related to the great events of salvation, days of grace, days of the Lord, days for reflecting on the meaning of Christ's coming and God's revelation. So, although today is the 30th June and tomorrow is the 1st July, and next Sunday is 5th July, we do not look on the marking of time in a merely secular manner, as if we agreed with the famous, but rather cynical definition of history as 'one damn thing after another'. For we live in the spirituality of *Anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord, and we are living in the Lord's time, that interval between the decisive redemptive acts of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter Day and the End, the final Day of Christ, the Day of his revealing. Each Advent I find myself musing on this mysterious passing of 2,000 years, and wonder how long before the fullness of time is complete again, and time is swallowed up in eternity. This understanding is profoundly counter-cultural, not just in the fact that here time is understood theologically and not merely in a secular way; Stephen Cherry commented to me that in supermarkets today there is no seasonality, which may be convenient, but also represents a loss of association and sensitivity to and enjoyment of the changing seasons, not to mention the cost of air miles.

The only fly in the ointment is that unfortunate phrase 'ordinary time', by which we mean non-seasonal time. Of course, we need non-seasonal time, 'green time', down time, and yes, in that sense it is ordinary; it just sits so awkwardly with the bigger concept of 'redeemed time' and so to me suggests a lack of imagination.

So the Calendar assists us as Anglican Christians to be counter-cultural; to understand time in relation to Christ, and as part of the outworking of God's eternal purposes. It is also helpful for balance: let me quote from the Introduction to *Times and Seasons*:

Christ died once for all for our salvation, on a particular date in human history. His death, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews insists, is a unique and unrepeatable event. But this event, like his incarnation and his resurrection, which are also events in the stream of history, transcends history: it is one day and every day. Every day is both Good Friday and Easter Day, because Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are present to us every day. It is hard to comprehend so much eternal reality in a single day, and it is not surprising that the first Christians should, almost from the beginning, have celebrated the mystery of the Lord's passion on a particular day, the weekly anniversary of his resurrection. Over time, an annual cycle of commemoration was laid over the rhythm of the week. This provided the Church with a way of meditating deeply on the successive episodes of Christ's saving life and death, from his conception in Mary's womb, through his death and resurrection, to his ascension to his place at the right hand of the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit promised by him. Other kinds of commemoration have been added to the Christian year, those of apostles and martyrs, who had in a distinctive way witnessed to the passion of Christ.

The liturgical year thus provides a structure for the Church's collective memory, a way of consecrating our human experience of time in the celebration of God's work – in Christ and in human beings being made holy through Christ – a work which is both unrepeatable in time and incomprehensively beyond time. It asserts a Christian understanding of time as a context of God's grace, against the world's purely functional reckoning of time

Times and Seasons p. 1

But there is a further dimension that I want to comment on. Human beings have tended, naturally enough, to reckon time according to their observation of the sun or the moon.

It is a remarkable fact that Jewish rabbinic tradition gave special honour to the date we know as March 25th. This was reckoned as the first day of creation, the date of the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, the day of the original Passover and escape from Egypt, the date that the plague ceased at the threshing-floor of Araunah, designating the site of the Temple of Solomon, the place where God would, as it were, dwell on earth. This tradition was taken up by the Fathers of the Church in calculating that historically, as far as their reckoning went, Jesus also died on 25th March, the Day of the Lord – what else would you expect? But because of his divinity his conception must also have been on the 25th March, for his entire life from conception to death must have been a perfect circle of time. If his conception was on 25th March, his birth, because of his divinity, must have been a perfect

nine months, and therefore the date of his birth must have been 25th December. Moreover, this was reckoned to be the date of the winter solstice. So, Christ was conceived at the spring equinox, was born at the winter solstice and died at the spring equinox. To balance this, his cousin, John the Baptist, six months older was conceived at the autumn equinox and born at the summer solstice, so we keep his feast day on June 24th (one day less because John isn't divine!) Moreover, Christ's death, at the Spring equinox was at Passover, itself calculated by the Paschal new moon, bringing into one both solar and lunar calendars.

This seems amazing to us, but for the Fathers of the Church, it pointed to the cosmic significance of Christ and was part of the Church's proclamation of his eternal and universal Lordship. In a fine essay, Pope Benedict cites such Patristic witness in the following quotation:

There are magnificent texts in the writings of the Fathers that express this synthesis (between the solar cycle and the events of redemption). For example, St Jerome in a Christmas sermon says this: "Even creation approves our preaching. The universe itself bears witness to the truth of our words. Up to this day the dark days increase, but from this day the darkness decreases....The light advances, while the night retreats." Likewise, St Augustine preaching at Christmas to his flock in Hippo: "Brethren, let us rejoice for this day consecrates for us, not the visible sun, but the sun's invisible Creator." Again and again, the Fathers take up the verse we have already quoted from Psalm 19. For the early church this became the real Christmas psalm: the sun, that is Christ, is like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber....Between the two dates of March 25 and December 25 comes the Feast of the Forerunner, St John the Baptist, on June 24, at the time of the summer solstice. The link between the dates can now be seen as a liturgical and cosmic expression of the Baptist's words, "He [Christ] must increase and I must decrease" (John 3.30). The birthday of St John the Baptist takes place on the date when the days begin to shorten, just as the Birthday of the Christ takes place when the days begin to lengthen. The fabric of this feast is of an entirely Christian weave, without direct precedent in the Old Testament. However, it stands in continuity with the synthesis of cosmos and history, of remembrance and hope, that was already characteristic of the Old Testament feasts and took on a new form in the Christian calendar. The close interweaving of incarnation and resurrection can be seen precisely in the relation, both proper and common, that each has to the rhythm of the sun and its symbolism.

Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp. 108-109.

My point is that the passing of time is part of our Christian spirituality and it has implications for our discipleship. I might say in passing, that although our supermarkets have no seasonality, I am interested to note what kinds of 'secular calendars' are running in society: as well as family events and commemorations, there is a strong sporting calendar, as well as the observance of popular 'feasts': New Year, Valentines, Mothers'

Day (sic), Fathers' Day, Hallowe'en, etc. There is an important issue here for Christian mission, and of course the Christian and secular calendars do intersect.

2. Daily Prayer

I was brought up on a diet of the Parish Communion and Evensong from the age of 6, when I joined the Church Choir. Often, especially in the Green Seasons, the Parish Communion would begin with a morning hymn or a hymn about Sunday. The office hymn at Evensong was invariably 'an evening hymn'. Morning naturally makes us think of creation *Morning has broken like the first morning*, etc), and on Sundays, of Resurrection: the day of Light (Genesis 1) is the day of new creation in Christ. I might pause here to say that there is a theological symmetry between creation and redemption.

Creation began on the evening of the first day of the week; in other words Saturday evening according to Jewish reckoning, 'And there was evening and there was morning, the first day'. Out of that darkness, the word *Fiat lux* began creation, even though the authors knew full well that creation of sun and moon was later on day four. 'Light' is hence a metaphor, a theological and philosophical statement. On the sixth day of the week, Thursday evening to Friday afternoon, came first the animals, and then, we might imagine at the full light of noon, the creation of human beings, in God's image and likeness, completing and perfecting creation: 'it was very good'. Then on Friday evening, the Sabbath began, the day of rest. So in the Gospel chronology of redemption, especially in St John's Gospel, we see a similar sequence. John 12.1, 'Six days before the Passover'; well, if Passover was Friday, this brings us back to Saturday evening, to a meal at Bethany after the conclusion of the Sabbath Day, when Jesus was anointed by Mary; the next day, he enters the city, Palm Sunday. On the sixth day of the week of redemption, at noon, Jesus is brought out to the crowds; 'Behold the Man', says Pilate – man in the image and likeness of God. At 3pm, the end of the sixth day, Jesus completes the work of redemption – 'It is accomplished'. On the evening of Friday, the Sabbath begins, the second Sabbath of God, as God again rests from his work. And during darkness on the first day of the week, Saturday night to Sunday dawn, *Fiat lux* again heralds the new creation, the resurrection of the Lord from the dead. And where was the resurrection revealed? Well, like Genesis we are in a Garden, Joseph's garden, but instead of estrangement, there is recognition, 'Mary'. None of this is coincidental. Theologically, Christ recapitulates the human story; 'a Second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came'.

The point is that daily prayer reflects this movement: Morning Prayer has the spirituality of creation-new creation, and therefore of the resurrection. Evening Prayer has two foci; the first is the victory of Christ over the powers of darkness. This is symbolised by the Blessing of Light, the *lucernarium*. Of course, in the early church, this was in part practical; but it became spiritualised. The Cross has defeated darkness. Hence, the evening collect, 'Lighten our darkness' takes up this same theme. To this is added the spirituality of

Christ's self-offering: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'. Morning Prayer reminds us of birth and beginning; evening prayer of death and consummation.

3. **Epiclesis**

Stephen asked me to say something about my work on the epiclesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. To me, one of the tragedies of eucharistic theology is that historically, the work of the Spirit has been limited to notions of consecration or virtually excluded: the east regarding consecration as being effected by the epiclesis following the institution narrative, and the west by the words of Jesus alone, 'This is my body; this is my blood.' Moreover, there has been a hang-up about 'moments of consecration', rendering the rest of the eucharistic prayer as merely so much verbiage! But we are beginning to learn a new way; virtually all contemporary eucharistic prayers include an invocation of the Spirit. But this can be narrow or expansive. Let me use Eucharistic Prayer F as an example. We pray the *anamnesis*, our *active* remembrance:

Therefore we proclaim the death he suffered on the cross,
we celebrate his resurrection, his bursting from the tomb,
we rejoice that he reigns at your right hand on high
and we long for his coming in glory.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Recognising that Christ prays vicariously in his eternal intercession at the right hand of the Father, we then we ask the Father to effect consecration by the Spirit:

As we recall the one, perfect sacrifice of our redemption,
Father, by your Holy Spirit let these gifts of your creation
be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ;

But it doesn't stop there, because we then go on to invoke the Spirit on the worshippers:

form us into the likeness of Christ
and make us a perfect offering in your sight.

Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.

But it doesn't stop there, because we then invoke the Spirit on the world:

Look with favour on your people
and in your mercy hear the cry of our hearts.
Bless the earth, heal the sick, let the oppressed go free
and fill your Church with power from on high.

Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.

But it doesn't stop there, because we then move into eschatological consummation:

Gather your people from the ends of the earth
to feast with [N and] all your saints
at the table in your kingdom,
where the new creation is brought to perfection
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

One of the remarkable things about Romans 8 is that salvation is about human beings, yes, but not just human beings; it is also about the liberation of creation itself from bondage to decay to share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. So, it's about humanity and our context. And the truth is that at the Communion, we actually see it happening before our eyes— if only we have eyes to see. Because at the Consecration, on the basis of the saving death and passion of Jesus, we ask the Father to send the Spirit – to send the Spirit upon bread and wine, bits of creation, so that they become transformed as the vehicles of divine grace, which in turn transform us as we receive all the benefits of Christ's saving passion. And in those moments, on the Holy Table and in our hands, and in our mouths, we glimpse our future – for the holy gifts are a foretaste of a transformed creation and the transformation we experience is a foretaste of a transformed humanity, through the work and power of Holy Spirit. So communion itself is expansive – it is about us, but not just us – it's about a renewed humanity, a renewed creation. In communion we glimpse our future and we are empowered by the same Spirit to anticipate that future now – to seek to bring into the present the freedom, joy, and wholeness of the Kingdom of God. Which is why the Eucharist is such a magnificent enactment of hope – for a moment we see our future, and we are empowered to live that future now.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me mention just two consequences of all this. Such an understanding enables us to see time as a gift. For mysteriously, yet wonderfully, God invites us to share with him in the unfolding of his purposes in time. Those purposes mean making Christ known through the witness of Christian worship, and daily personal witness, through our words and our deeds, to the hope we have within us because we have this conviction of redeemed time. Our daily prayer must be: 'Help us, Lord, to use the gift of today to your glory, or in the words of the third morning collect – give us grace 'to do always that is righteous in thy sight'. Indeed, the gift of prayer itself is an engagement of desire for the coming of the Kingdom, stated with urgency in the Lord's Prayer:

Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The second is to use our eyes and imaginations, and see how the rhythms of the natural world become their own commentary on the realities of salvation. So, can we once again see the quarter days as significant, equinox and solstice, as the sun itself witnesses to the true Sun of righteousness.

At Cathedral Matins on the Sunday nearest 21 December, I always choose Charles Wesley's great hymn:

Christ, who glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light;
Sun of Righteousness, arise
triumph o'er the shades of night:
dayspring from on high, be near,
daystar, in my heart appear.

- precisely because it is the nearest Sunday to the Winter Solstice, the rising of the true Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his wings. So we rejoice that light overcomes darkness, spring overcomes winter, day overcomes night. Can we see each day as a picture of redemption: each morning revealing the coming of the risen one, rising while it was yet dark, to shed abroad his marvellous light, and the evening as the light of Christ banishing the darkness, just as the Early Church used to bless the light of the evening lamps – 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord'. And before sleep, at the end of the day, a commending of our spirits into the Father's hand, as the ancient hymn states:

As Christ upon the cross,
his head inclined
and to his Father's hands
his parting soul resigned.

So now myself, her soul,
would wholly give
into his sacred charge,
in whom all spirits live.

And actively to embrace the Church calendar, with the changing theological and spiritual themes of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Eastertide, Pentecost, the calendar of festivals, saints and martyrs, as through each we hold the Church's collective memory of those events and themes of salvation by which we live and through which we see salvation for ourselves and for the world.

Redeemed time, sanctified time, holy time, Christ's time, human time which he has taken into God's eternity. Time to use, never time to waste; time to pray, time to live the Gospel, time to work for the coming Kingdom, time to cherish:

For in the fullness of time, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might obtain adoption as sons.