

30th July 2019

Preacher: Katherine Baxter

Hymns: 82 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
 92 Think of a world without any flowers
 102 For the beauty of the earth
 124 For the fruits of all creation
 483 We are marching in the light of God

Readings: Exodus 37:17-24
 Matthew 6:19-34

“ON THE WHOLE”

I remember it clearly July 20th 1969, my mother was crying, I was five, and this was the first time I experienced an adult crying about something that wasn't sad. Tears rolling down her face as we all watched on our black and white Bush television the fuzzy pictures of an astronaut climbing down a ladder from a very homemade looking space craft covered in tin-foil. My mother had been overwhelmed by the enormity and wonder of such an event. Over one billion people worldwide probably felt the same experience as they watched these images. Neil Armstrong's quote as his space-boot settled in the dust of the moon. *“one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”*. It actually doesn't quite make sense since "Man" and "Mankind" have the same meaning. Neil Armstrong actually meant to say *“... one small step for a man...”* referring to himself setting foot on the Moon and his first footstep on the Moon having deep implications for all people. Later on the astronaut himself mused that he hoped that the annals of history would analyse his words for what he *meant* to say, but whatever the grammar, the sentiment of that moment in time was echoed throughout the World.

We can only imagine what it's like to stand on the Moon and look at the distant Earth. People become so accustomed to our view of the heavens, but to turn and see the Earth in all its blue glory is a sight only a very few have been privileged to enjoy. According to his son, in an interview over the past few weeks, one thing stayed with Neil Armstrong all his life. Standing on the moon he turned to the marble ball of the earth, he found that he could hold up his thumb and completely block the view of Earth. He often spoke of how lonely it felt, and also how beautiful our only home really is. When he returned he made it his life's task to educate and to protect the beautiful and fragile planet we call Earth.

And that has become a pressing and very urgent task in the last few years, the powerful Nations seem deaf and blind to the catastrophic pressures man is putting upon the Earth. The young people of our world are desperate to fight to retain the beauty and wonder of our God's creation.

We've just sung about that beauty in that wonderful hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth.", by Folliot Pierpoint, that beautiful world that we inhabit, praising many aspects of existence; the earth and skies, tree and flower, human love and "best gift divine." This hymn is a great reminder of all the beauty that surrounds us and to not take this for granted! And realize that we should work to save creation, because God's creation works to save us. Our gospel reading from Matthew tells us today:

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"

This passage speaks of how we see that God's at work. We see that love and joy and peace and grace are present in abundance, that this world is teeming with his beauty and his goodness, if we have the eyes to see it, and the heart to align with it. If we see the light and not the darkness, we need not worry.

Everything that is good and healing comes from God's creation. The ancient Hebrews knew that, as they modelled their most sacred icon on a natural lowly plant, that gave so much life healing properties. Our Father of this church and Methodism knew it. John Wesley was so far beyond his time regarding his natural and alternative therapies. His book *Primitive Pysick* we just spoke about, highlighted so many ills could be cured by substances found in the natural world, herbs and flowers found in meadows, wayside verges and kitchen gardens. As I said earlier, he was 'Mr. Organic' before the name was invented!!! Nowadays he would have had his own brand.

Although man's scientific invention didn't miss him either, his reputation as a pioneer for electrical treatment as a therapy for mind and body was seen as inspired by some and met by scepticism by others. But through all of these pursuits John Wesley had a great understanding of God's creation, and how we can live hand in hand with its bounty, and how that can nourish not only our bodies but also nourish our heart and soul.

Wesley believed that Christian faith was the way to wholeness and that it was a Christian's duty to keep the body and mind healthy and wholesome, and to be prepared and set apart or kept 'holy' to serve God:

But I, for one, can endorse Wesley's ideas and beliefs, especially about sage tea.... I came to herbal medicine because I became ill, as many of you know, I was very ill with ME Chronic fatigue syndrome in my twenties.... modern medicine could not help me.

I don't want to detail symptoms and the years of anguish that followed, but I discovered something that would stay with me the rest of my life about alternative therapies the value of looking at the body as a whole.... holistically. Treating the cause rather than the symptom, relating energy and well-being to one's spirit and spiritual health.

Yep, I did it all, I tried it all...in between a few escapades with dodgy therapists and bizarre treatments, some very bizarre!!! But they didn't involve puppies or toads. I found that natural, plant based and organic remedies were the best. But I know through that experience, that cleansing, detoxing and regenerating of one's body in a natural way brings you much closer to one's own spiritual life. Literally, this nourishment led me to come back to my faith in God and eventually my calling as a preacher.

A strong spiritual life to John Wesley meant treating the whole body, mind and spirit. Holiness was an energy that didn't come from books and piety, it came from the feet upwards. Holiness came through action and mission of spreading divine love and wholeness from God to all those created in God's image, that live in the kingdom of God's Creation. Wesley wanted believers to experience and live out the presence of God at every moment of their lives, he once claimed that there was no holiness but Social holiness. Relationships, and love and mission are a necessity for Christian fellowship. We are whole holistic beings created by god as beautifully as the "lilies of the field"

But **we, as humans have** the ability to care and love for each-other, brother, sister, parent child, stranger, immigrant, and refugee. But for that to happen Wesley believed in the importance of caring for our inner selves as well as our outer selves. So often the outer is what everyone sees but the inner self can be messy and unresolved, to embrace and care for both, we can eventually flourish and become one, body mind and spirit. Perfect in the sight of God.

*"For each perfect Gift of Thine
To our race so freely given,
Graces human and Divine,*

Flowers of earth, and buds of Heaven

The lines form Pierrepont's hymn so apt and profound. They lead me to a sad yet positive end to this sermon. We began with Neil Armstrong, a man and his fellow astronauts that gave hope to mankind, we bear in mind the courage and the bravery of those two astronauts as they walked on the moon. In their minds they had already completed a task that they didn't think they would achieve...the odds for them getting back to Earth were 50/50. Neil Armstrong knew if he survived he would make it a lifelong quest to save this beautiful planet of ours. We have to be inspired by that courage, and that sentiment.

My wonderful courageous friend and an inspiring minister (Julyan Drew) showed me that wonder in creation and faith as he approached the end of his life in a hospice in Hayle in Cornwall in the last week. The hospice is a tranquil place, a circular building at the center a beautiful garden of herbs, flowers and fountains. The last time I saw him I wheeled him around the garden in his wheelchair, he leant forward and grabbed a bunch of lavender and smelt it. He turned to me and said "the beauty of this garden astounds me, as I leave this World I know that all this beauty will go with me"

As I deal with grief of losing him, I am uplifted by his absolute certainty, that there is more beauty and wonder when we at last meet our maker.

We should work to save creation, because God's creation works to save us.

We have to join that fight to save and protect our planet...as that famous quote from Mahatma GHANDI states... that we must "**Live more simply so that others may simply live**".

Amen.