

Moderator's First Service – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair

Let us worship God for this is the day that the Lord has made

HYMN Praise my soul the King of heaven

Praise my soul the King of heaven, to His feet thy tribute bring
Ransomed healed restored forgiven, who like me His praise should sing
Praise him praise Him, Praise Him praise Him Praise the everlasting King

Praise Him for His grace and favour, to our fathers in distress
Praise him still the same for ever, slow to chide and swift to bless
Praise Him praise Him, Praise Him praise Him, glorious in His faithfulness

Father like He tends and spares us, well our feeble frame He know
In his hands He gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes
Praise Him praise Him, Praise Him praise Him, widely as His mercy flows

Frail as summer's flower we flourish, blows the wind and it is gone
But while mortals rise and perish, God endures unchanging on
Praise Him praise Him, Praise Him praise Him, Praise the high eternal One

Angels help us to adore Him, ye behold Him face to face
Sun and moon bow down before Him, dwellers all in time and space
Praise Him praise Him, Praise Him praise Him, Praise with us the God of grace

READING John 1:1-18 from The Message Translation Read by the Rev Aftab Gohar

REFLECTION

This book Sophie's World was in its day an international best seller. It's really an introduction to philosophy which may not make it sound like a page turner but its set up as a novel and is a great read. Let me read a small section for you. What is the most important thing in life? If we ask someone living on the edge of starvation, the answer is food. If we ask someone dying of cold, the answer is warmth. If we put the same question to someone who feels lonely and isolated, the answer will probably be the company of other people. But when those basic needs have been satisfied, will there be something that everybody needs. Philosophers think so. They believe that man can not live by bread alone. Of course everyone needs food and everyone needs love and care. But there is something else apart from that which everyone needs and that is, to figure out who we care and why we are here.

So there we have 2 big questions. Who am I and why am I here? Philosophical questions yes, but deep theological questions for sure. Who am I and why am I here? The first of these questions is one of identity and the second is one of purpose. Today we are going to think on the first question who am I? This

question of our identity and next week we'll consider the second, why am I here? What's the point of me being on earth? What is my purpose? The author of Sophie's world offers us two thoughts as we begin this quest, of discovering our identity who I am. He begins by saying that we begin to discover who we are when we discover that we are not just ourselves. In other words that there are others around us and that it is in connecting with them, that we begin to discover who we are in terms of our connectedness to others. Maybe we can think of it this way. That it is impossible to understand ourselves without thinking about all those around us. Look for a moment at the pebbles on this stony beach. You can hardly think of one without the others. They somehow belong together. The second thing he suggests and this is a new addition to the original writing of the book. He says that we begin to understand who we are, when we realise that we are connected with the world in which we live. And he goes as far as to say, that we can't understand who we are, we'll never ever have a true sense of our identity, unless we understand that it somehow wrapped up in our connectedness with where we are. So two things as we begin to answer. First of all our identity is in our connectedness with other people and our connectedness with the environment.

As for our connectedness to the creation, right at the beginning the book of Genesis makes it abundantly clear that we are part of what God has made. We have a pleasant special place within that. We are set as stewards over creation. But none the less we are part of it and our connectedness to it, is vital to who we are. I wonder who you see when you look up close at yourself. Who are you? What is your identity? In recent years of course we have seen the rise in so called identity politics. We hear people saying all the time: 'I identify as this or that or the next thing'. I guess as I think about myself, my Scottishness is important to me, but I also understand myself to be British. I identify I think about myself as a male, as a husband, as a father, as a son. There are so many aspects as how I might define myself. As I look to answer the question who am I? Everything that I have described so far is important to me. My connectedness to others, my connectedness to the creation and those other things that I have mentioned. My sense of who I am in relation to the place I come from, the people I'm part of and my understanding of myself in relation to family. Those who are immediately around me. All that is important as I think about my identity of who I am. But as a Christian there is something more. Of course there is something much more. Right there at the very start of John's gospel in the first chapter we hear the phrase: 'Children of God, children of God'. My friends, here is the key ultimately to who I am. Ultimately my identity is as a child of God.

Yes all those other things matter in terms of how I piece together my understanding of who I am. But they are all arranged underneath this key and crucial and most important conviction that first and foremost I am a child of God. This underpins everything else and without that, there is something essential missing. I am a child of God. That's who I am. That's who I identify as. My relating to other people, my relating to this planet all flow out of the fact that first and foremost, I am related to a loving God who in His grace

and through his son has declared me to be his child. It's on this solid rock that I build this firm foundation of being a child of God and this is my identity. This is who I am.

But even then there is something else that must be said and it's this. I am only a child of God because of what Jesus has done for me. Because Jesus came into the world for me, because Jesus has lived His life for me and in the end because Jesus gave His life for me. That's why I can say with confidence in response to the question who am I? I am a child of God because of Jesus. Friends, let us never ever take that for granted. Let us never ever become blase about this truth, that Jesus gave Himself for us that we might be children of God. Let us then keep His cross ever before us as a reminder of this truth. Let us hold fast to His cross. By the cross we are children of God.

HYMN When I survey the wondrous cross

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most I sacrifice them to His blood.

See! from His head, His hands, His feet sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION The Reverend Rosie Frew Convenor of Faith Nurture Forum

Lord God,

We give thanks for all those who nurture faith – through work with children, in discipleship, in the leading of worship, in outreach to the world around.

We give thanks and pray for those who engage with children and young people in Sunday schools and Messy Church, mid-week activities and holiday clubs, youth groups and school chaplaincies. Inspire them as they keep our young people involved in different ways. Encourage them as, in faith, they plant seeds in hearts and minds.

We give thanks and pray for those who lead Bible studies and discussion groups, wrestling with the issues of the day, seeking to open minds and mature faith.

We give thanks and pray for those who are leading worship at this time, challenged to adapt to new ways of engaging. We give thanks for new opportunities to touch hearts and minds. We pray for discernment as we move forward – what to take with us, what to leave behind.

We give thanks and pray for those in the ministries of the church – parish ministers, Ordained Local Ministers, Chaplains and specialist ministries, Deacons, Readers and Locums. Grant them strength and wisdom in these difficult days; imagination and openness as they seek your guiding.

We pray for those discerning a call to ministry, those in training, those seeking their first charge. Be their light, their support, their assurance in their questioning, in their formation.

We give thanks and pray for the members of the new Faith Nurture Forum and for the staff working from their homes – for their commitment to the life and work of the church in these uncertain times - supporting, resourcing, enabling, encouraging, responding to change, working alongside congregations, concerned for the poorest and most marginalised.

We give thanks and pray for each other. For the assurance of your love and care; for your peace in our lives; for hearts on fire with the good news of Jesus; for imagination and courage in mission and fresh expressions of faith; for willingness to embrace the challenges of the changing days ahead.

In Jesus name we pray

Amen

HYMN I stand amazed in the Presence

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene

And wonder how He could love me a sinner, condemned, unclean

How marvellous! how wonderful! And my song shall ever be:

How marvellous! how wonderful! Is my Saviour's love for me!

For me it was in the garden He prayed not my will but Thine

He had no tears for His own griefs but sweat drops of blood for mine

How marvellous! how wonderful! And my song shall ever be:

How marvellous! how wonderful! Is my Saviour's love for me!

He took my sins and my sorrows, and made them His very own;

He bore the burden to Calvary and suffered and died alone

How marvellous! how wonderful! And my song shall ever be:

How marvellous! how wonderful! Is my Saviour's love for me!

When with the ransomed in glory His face I at last shall see

It will be my joy through the ages to sing of His love for me

How marvellous! how wonderful! And my song shall ever be:

How marvellous! how wonderful! Is my Saviour's love for me!

BENEDICTION May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all today and forever more. Amen