

St Peter's, Mount Park Road, Ealing
Sunday 7th September 2014
Trinity 12 (Proper 18)

In the beginning.

It is no mistake that the most influential publication in human history opens with the words 'In the beginning'. Think how scripture would have read if the first words had been different, may be 'Once upon a time'; or 'As I was walking in the woods one day'; or some other fairly innocuous opening, what kind of flavour or character would the Bible have had. I know the bible is a collection of writings spanning many centuries and some would argue that Genesis is not the oldest or the first of the written material. Still, it is no accident that Genesis opens scripture and it is no accident that Genesis begins with the words 'In the beginning'.

Beginnings evoke different emotions in people, often dependent on the situation or event. For example I really looked forward to the beginning of the new school term, not I hasten to add because I was a swot or particularly conscientious student. It was more to do with the new clothes I got to wear and the progression into a new class which of course meant I was getting older and more mature which at 9 or 10 is really important. When I progressed to secondary school my view of beginnings changed. No longer was I enthusiastic with changes in class because that meant more work and getting closer to serious exams. Beginning a new relationship can be fully of apprehension, butterflies in the tummy, a flutter in the heart. Beginning a new job can be quite daunting, excited by new challenges yet fearful of failure and rejection by colleagues.

There is also the point that beginnings will have endings too. In the case of school, when we leave for the next establishment whether it be university or employment; in jobs maybe the ending comes through changing jobs, promotion or retirement; in relationships when they break down or are brought to an end by Anno Domini. In the frame nothing seems constant.

With each new beginning comes a whole raft of other elements. There is the hopefulness of the new event. The hope that it will be a time of success or growth or fulfilment. There are expectations too, both in yourself and from others around you. And in making that step into a new beginning there are plans we have and hope to fulfil.

In the context of the opening words of scripture we see the beginnings of the story of redemption, the redemption of the human race, of all creation in the love of God through which we were created. A story that begins with the place of God in the scheme of creation, continues with a story of how humanity became separated from the creator and how, over centuries the creator and humanity made many attempts to bridge that same gap. Ultimately for us this reunification comes in the person of Jesus Christ, he whom we claim to be the Son of God.

It is here that the concept of beginnings changes, at least in the case of salvation and the scriptural story. Through Jesus Christ we have the promise of salvation from sin. Sin defined as that which separates us from God and prevents us from being whole, complete, fulfilled. Through the cross and the empty tomb we are redeemed, we are made new or at least the offer is there for redemption for it needs our consent, our acceptance our freely receiving of salvation and accepting it for our own. This one

off event in history, the crucifixion of the redeemer of the world has opened the way to life everlasting.

Yet in the Easter story is recognised human frailty, the other aspect of the story of salvation which is told throughout scripture. Each time God reaches out and we respond something happens; humanity gets impatient and we build golden calves, misunderstanding happens and humanity is thrown out of paradise; we succumb to greed and the desire for power and wealth and humanity is driven into Exile and is lost in the wilderness.

Underlying all this and made abundantly clear in the crucifixion is the constancy of God. God, who loves us and made us and wants us to be more than we are now. God who wants to heal us and make us whole is constantly there for us. God consistently holds out his hand to receive us. Ultimately, in the cross of Golgotha God's arms are outstretched wide in God's Son, receiving the nails so his arms can never be closed.

Here comes a new understanding of beginnings. This is a new beginning offered to each and every one of us who will listen. This is a new beginning offered every time we make our confession, every time we come to the altar to receive the body and blood of Jesus in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Every time we receive Jesus into our hearts we are offered a new beginning. It is no accident Bible begins 'In the beginning' and it is no accident John echoes those words with a level of explanation 'In the beginning was the Word'. God is constantly with us and offers us a new beginning every day, whenever we make a mistake or find we have moved away from God, whenever we have sinned against God or neighbour, God is there and offers us a new start. He forgives us and heals us and make us whole. He offers himself to us that we might be forgiven and can begin again.