

2nd before Lent, 2015

What is it that prompts people to write, to paint, to sculpt, to create music? Is it a deeply felt urge that has to be satisfied, like Tchaikovsky, rolling around in his final feverish state, clutching his head and moaning, “The music, so much music”? Or is it like JS Bach, turning out cantata after cantata, week in, week out, just for the worship at St Thomas’s Leipzig? Or is it the money? The patron must be placated, the editor kept at bay, the bank manager silenced? Balzac and Dickens wrote like that, Thackeray and others were paid by the word for their weekly instalments, hence the huge tomes that emerge from 19th Century pens.

Sometimes, and really only sometimes, works are created collaboratively, collectively, in a shared space of mutual understanding and co-creation. They are rare, because by nature we want to keep our creations to ourselves, to claim all the glory, to bask in our own success. Not so God. God only ever creates collaboratively.

Why should God create, anyway? Existing outside created time and space, in an eternity of delight and holiness, why should God create anything? Isn’t heaven enough? Creation itself is not the mystery – it is a wonderful thing, but it is not mysterious. Why creation exists at all is the mystery.

Our three passages today are an attempt at understanding that mystery, and each one gropes towards an understanding by

considering the way that God collaborates as the creation unfolds.

For the writer of the Proverbs, it is the partnership between God and Wisdom that is creative. Holiness and wisdom combined to produce an ordered creation, and in that combination the divinity delights, and goes on to rejoice in all that they create together. God & Wisdom make dragonflies, and laugh until sunset.

For the Apostle Paul, writing to the Church in Colossae, God and Christ worked collaboratively in creating the universe, and Christ is the glue that holds that universe together. What is more, that function of holding all the created order in unity is doubled up by Christ’s work of reconciliation and redemption in his body on the cross – made possible by Christ’s active participation in the initial creation.

For the writer of John’s Gospel, the Messiah is God’s collaborator in creation. Together, they create light, life and truth, and we, sanctified observers, see the glory of the Godhead revealed both in the world and in our rebirth as the children of God.

Delight, rejoicing, pleasure, glory – all are there as God creates collaboratively, and we are the beneficiaries.

So why doesn’t it work? Why is this world such a mess, with God’s creatures unable to live together in peace, with terrible things happening both in the natural world and in the so-called

civilised world and even people of faith unable to get along? Does it have something to do with this idea of collaboration? Is it our self-centredness, which contrasts so markedly with God's outward-facing, inclusive love and creativity, which leads us to such hardship and soul-searching?

Why is it so hard to work together, to live together, to accept one another? Why do we live such narrow, restricted lives, with boundaries of our own making and self-imposed limits to our comfort zone? Why does the railway line through Kew create a sense of us and them, whichever side of it we live? And the river? North or south of the river makes such a difference, psychologically, to so many people, but we are all the same, wherever we live, whichever side of any demarcation we fall. We all breathe God's air, walk on God's soil, eat God's food and share his presence every day.

The Church is just as bad. We have recently received from the Bishop a piece of paper which states that people from either parish, after publication of banns or the obtaining of a licence, can get married in either church. Up until now, that was not possible. When this joint benefice was set up, the two parishes were described as "wholly separate and distinct" – and in 1985, that was necessary for the scheme to be agreed locally as well as at diocesan level. Were it being set up today, such a clause would never be inserted, so there would be no need for the subsequent action that we have had to initiate from the Bishop.

It is only by doing things together that we will grow, it is only by visibly collaborating that they world outside these walls with give us any credibility, it is only by collaborating that the delight and praise and glory of God our creator will be glimpsed by more than we happy few.

And for people like Stephen Fry, who can't be doing with a God who creates misery and disease – as if – people of faith have got to be seen to be so open, so co-operative, so accepting of each other and the myriad differences that our creator has come up with in humanity, let alone all the other orders that teem upon this planet and throughout the universe, that no one can any longer ignore that generosity of God, that collaborative creativity of God, that delight that God has in otherness and his eternal willingness to work with that otherness for the greater good of all and for the praise of his glory.

Let us start with each other, here this morning, and then branch radically out into the whole of Kew, as Lent draws on. We shall welcome and love and accept each other this morning, in music, in prayer, in peace, in bread and wine, and so reflect the collaborative God we adore. And then, from Shrove Tuesday to Easter, we shall work together with all God's people here in Kew to get to grips with the difficult issues facing us as a nation as an election approaches, so that when we bring the candidates here to quiz them on 29th April, they will see that we, the people of God, are united, collaborating with each other, accepting of each other, working together to share God's goodness and generosity with all. And that, surely, is only the beginning.....