

Church on the Corner

7th October 2018

Readings

Exodus 6:2-8, Romans 8:18-25.

Introduction

To my mind one of the finest moments of TV in recent years was when an ordinary middle aged woman (with learning difficulties), from West Lothian in Scotland stepped on to stage of 'Britain's Got Talent' to raised eyebrows from judges and audience alike. Asked what her dream was, she wanted to be like Elaine Page, and they laughed. She went on to deliver a rendition of 'I Dreamed a Dream' from Les Miserables which to this day sends shivers down the spine. I'd show the clip, but it is actually too emotional. We'd all be in pieces.

Now I've thought about why this is such a moving moment. And I suspect that it is not just because we see the proud humbled, and the lowly lifted up, but because it taps into a hope that lies deep in all of us, a belief that even in the despised broken and ordinary things of this world contain a beauty and great worth if only it could be set free.

And that is the thing we call redemption.

Now of course Susan Boyle is a fine Christian woman and she knows well that redemption does not really mean winning Britains got talent, or even singing a duet with Elaine Page in front of the Queen (which she did). Redemption is one of the great narrative of scripture. It means to be bought back from captivity, and to be set free.

The foundational expression of that redemption is in Exodus. The people of God are slaves in Egypt, building brick without straw. Moses says to Pharaoh "Let my people go" but Pharaoh won't.

The Passover is where the Israelites take a lamb without spot or blemish and sacrifice it, daubing the rough wooden crossbeam of their door with its blood, and when the angel sees that act of faith, it will pass over the house, and the firstborn will be saved, and the people are granted their freedom. It is an event which defines them, and they remember it for millennia.

And then one Passover time some 2000 years ago, when another firstborn son without spot or blemish walked towards a wooden cross, though he had been declared innocent of guilt, and his blood was shed, as he said "*Father forgive them, they know not what they do*". That terrible price was a ransom, a price of redemption which bought back those enslaved by sin.

But that redemption is not just for us. In the Genesis story death comes into the world as a result of Adams sin and as a consequence creation itself is subject to decay. Paul articulates the effects of that in this passage of Romans. He describes Creation as "groaning in bondage to decay."

v22 Creation groans because death is at work in it. One year when our girls were small, we bought them two mice as pets. We thought they were both male. We were wrong. What followed was a good lesson in biology, but Baby mice often don't live that long, and the girls got rather more of a experience of the harsh realities of life and death than we ever intended. However as much as we want to shelter children from those realities, they are something that we all face.

The freedom earned by Christ will also set creation free.

v21 creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The Christian hope is that we look forward to creation redeemed, set free from decay and even death. Like a spring morning after a long winter as everything seems to be bursting into life, we will see the glory of creation restored.

v23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for the redemption of our bodies.

If the created world creaks and groans so do we. Some of you will know this acutely, suffering from chronic pain or disability. Others will know the anguish of unquiet minds, of anxiety and depression. We look forward to liberty - the redemption of our bodies.

So set this hope before you. Redemption is only begun, it is not yet complete.

24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? Celebrate the glimpses of it that you see, and with patience and long-suffering do not give up hope. And when life is hard, when things let you down, remember that God is a God of redemption.

And it means we never give up on people - no-one is beyond hope. There is always goodness and beauty to be found.

And it means we never give on this beautiful world. We care for it and steward it because it matters. I love the idea that we enact this in practical ways. I have an old chair in my office that was broken, and I restored it. It was a lovely exercise, but also a statement of this principle of redeeming things.

In the same way we care for this amazing building of which we are stewards. We fix things, we restore them. We make them beautiful again, and in doing so we reflect God's work in the world.

And that hope gives us courage

v18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

We never underestimate the struggle, the hardships which we face from time to time, but even those are not worth comparing to what lies ahead.

The Christian story is a story of redemption, but it is a redemption that is still ongoing. And we work hard to live out that beautiful principle of redemption from day to day, in the way we treat one another, and the way we care for our world. And we look forward to a day when that redemption is complete, when in the new creation God "*will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away*"