

SEASONS OF THE SPIRIT

September 4th 2002

CREATION

Choir	Veni Creator Spiritus	Plainsong
Reading	Genesis Chapter 1	
Reading	From St Augustine's Confessions	
Choir	The Heavens are telling	'Creation' by Haydn
Reading	From 'Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense	W H Vanstone
Choir	O Love that wilt not let me go	Tune St Margaret Text Albert Lister Peace
Reading	A Hymn to the Creator	W H Vanstone
Choir	For the beauty of the Earth	J Rutter
Reading	God's Grandeur	Gerard Manley Hopkins
Choir	What a wonderful world	Weiss/Theile arr Jones

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Choir Veni Creator Spiritus Plainsong

Reading Genesis

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness he called "night". And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day. And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it and it was so. God called the dry ground "land", and the gathered waters he called "seas". And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So god created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

When we contemplate the physical creation we see an unimaginably complex pattern and process, and the marvel of it is that at every level the constituent elements make and remake themselves. God not only makes the world, he makes it make itself. When we contemplate this amazing structure we wonder not that it is full of flaws, but that chaos doesn't overwhelm it. The Bible tells us that out of chaos God created order and pattern and beauty and purpose, a universe that at its heart and in its elements points to the selfgiving love of God himself.

St Augustine in his Confessions describes how he searched for God in the beauty of creation:-

‘What is this God? I asked the earth, and it answered, ‘I am not He,’ and all things that are in the earth made the same confession. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things, and they answered, ‘We are not your God; seek higher...’

I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and they answered, ‘Neither are we the God whom you seek.’ And I said to all the things that throng about the gateways of the senses, ‘Tell me something of Him.’ And they cried out in a great voice, ‘He made us.’ My question was my gazing upon them, and their answer was their beauty...I asked the whole frame of the universe about my God and it answered me, ‘I am not He, but He made me.’

Choir

The Heavens are telling

‘Creation’ by Haydn

The beauty of the Biblical account of creation and its echo in Haydn’s music suggests an image of creation that is one of serene and effortless activity; God simply spoke and things happened. The theologian William Vanstone reminds us that although such words and music convey an impression of resources held in reserve and limited endeavour, in fact the act of creation was and is a costly giving of God’s very self:

Reading

If the work of God in creation is the work of love, then truth demands an imagery which will do justice to the limitless self-giving which is among the marks of authentic love: and the imagery which the head demands may have a new power of appeal to the moral sensitivity of the heart.

As a parenthesis, we may illustrate the kind of imagery which might express the self-giving of God in creation. A doctor tells of an operation which, as a young student, he observed in a London hospital. ‘It was the first time that this particular brain operation had been carried out in this country. It was an operation of the greatest delicacy, in which a small error would have had fatal consequences. In the outcome the operation was a triumph; but it involved seven hours of intense and uninterrupted concentration on the part of the surgeon. When it was over, a nurse had to take him by the hand, and lead him from the operating theatre like a blind man or a little child.’ This, one might

say, is what self-giving is like; such is the likeness
of God, wholly given, spent and drained in that
sublime self giving which is the ground and source
and origin of the universe.

W H Vanstone: Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense

Choir

O Love that wilt not let me go

William Vanstone has put into verse what this costly self-giving, creative love is like.

Morning glory, starlit sky,
Leaves in springtime, swallows' flight,
Autumn gales, tremendous seas,
Sounds and scents of summer night;

Soaring music, tow'ring words,
Art's perfection, scholar's truth,
Joy supreme of human love,
Memory's treasure, grace of youth;

Open, Lord, are these, Thy gifts,
Gifts of love to mind and sense;
Hidden is love's agony,
Love's endeavour, love's expense.

Love that gives, gives ever more,
Gives with zeal, with eager hands,
Spare not, keep not, all outpours,
Ventures all, its all expends.

Drained is love in making full;
Bound in setting others free;
Poor in making many rich;
Weak in giving power to be.

Therefore He Who Thee reveals
Hangs, O Father, on that Tree
Helpless; and the nails and thorns
Tell of what Thy love must be.

Thou art God; no monarch Thou
Thron'd in easy state to reign;
Thou art God, Whose arms of love
Aching, spent, the world sustain.

W H Vanstone: Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense

So the creation points to God who stretched out his arms of love on the cross that all might be drawn to Him in loving response. And in spite of that costly giving God's creative love is never spent, never exhausted. "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."

Choir For the beauty of the earth Rutter

Reading God's Grandeur Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.

Choir What a wonderful world