

A sermon for 7th Feb 2021 : Second Sunday before Lent

The Reverend Ruth Hulse

What do Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Godzilla, the Matrix, Terminator, and Harry Potter have in common?

The answer is not that they are all good films, because of course that is subjective and a matter of taste, and I certainly don't regard them all as good films.

No, what they all have in common is that one of the characters is willing to lay down his or her life to save the other characters, or to bring about a balance in their world, to restore peace through their sacrifice.

These are popular films. These are huge films, watched by millions, and there are so many other examples of films where someone sacrifices themselves to save others or to bring about peace. Why? Why is this such a popular storyline? Could it be that deep down we know that things are not as they should be, that there is a hunger within the human race for someone to make things right, a need for peace and reconciliation? A need to know that someone is willing to put themselves on the line for us, to lay down their life for us?

Maybe. Or maybe I'm reading too much into it.

But if that is part of the reason why so many of us watch or listen to stories of this kind, why our hearts connect with news stories of those who seem to be sacrificing something for us, then the reading from Colossians has something to say to us. It also invites us to ask lots of questions and look for the answers.

So here's a question asked by a children's worker one Sunday morning:

What's brown, eats nuts and lives in a tree?"

The group are silent. And then a boy puts his hand up and says, "*I know the answer is Jesus, but it really does sound like a squirrel.*"

There is that joke isn't there, that in a church group, the answer is Jesus, even if you haven't been paying attention, even if you don't understand the question - put your hand up and say Jesus, and you're likely to get it right.

So, I'm going to give you a clue, to these following questions, the answer is Jesus, not squirrel. They are all questions I've been asked by children and young people, and they are all questions addressed by the readings from Colossians and John this morning.

1 What does God look like?

That's a classic question isn't it - the need for something concrete? The Colossians reading begins

"Jesus is the image of the invisible God."

But what does that mean? It means that if we want to know what God is like –then we look at Jesus. He's the one who makes the invisible God, visible.

One of Jesus' disciples, Philip, once said to him,

"Lord, show us the Father..." and Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:8-9)

So if there were photos from back then, would a photo of Jesus show us what God looks like? No, if I showed you a photograph of my children it would be an image of them, so there's more to it than just physical features...

So here's our second question to which the answer is Jesus:

2)Where does the world come from?

It might feel like we have heard the words from John 1 many times in the not too distant past, why would the creators of the lectionary include it today? Well today is Creation Sunday in the Church, and so we are invited to revisit those words from the gospel of John that are poetic and inspiring and make us think of Christmas - even on 7th February, go on admit it!

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

When we talk about the birth of Jesus – it's important to remember that Jesus did not begin to exist when Mary became pregnant. He was in the beginning, before the world was created. He was before time began - the Word was with God and the Word was God. Which means Jesus is eternal, with God. The image on earth of the eternal God.

But Jesus wasn't just there, watching as God the Father created and shaped the world, giving his opinion on how long the neck of a giraffe should be, or how deep to make the oceans, no,

"All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

Let's here's a third question often asked by children, to which the answer is Jesus.

3) Why does the universe exist?

Surely it doesn't make sense that the answer to this one is Jesus? It feels like the answer needs at least one other word: with, or because of, or by Jesus .

But Colossians 1: 16 says:

*“All things were created by him and **for him**. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

We are invited to reflect on Christ as both the source OF creation and the one who ensures its continuation.

‘All things were created for him’ points to Jesus being the very goal of creation. That the created order has no meaning apart from the Son. And we are part of the created order.

The final question for this morning that I have been asked more times than I can count, is a variation on a theme:

4) So What? What's in it for me? What's the point?

Well, back to those films where one of the characters lays down their life for the good of others, or to restore the world to peace.

The reading from Colossians finishes, ‘and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.’

ALL THINGS. If we have a hungering within us for someone to make things right, to be willing to put themselves on the line for us, well we are included in ALL THINGS.

WE are reconciled to God because Jesus made peace on the cross.

But unlike the films where the character who sacrifices themselves, is just a moment in time, maybe expected, perhaps even prophesied about in the storyline, Christ's sacrifice is not time limited, and is not just about bringing peace for that moment, until the next villain arises or the world faces its next crisis, no

Christ was in the beginning, creation came into being through Christ and for Christ, Christ entered creation, and Christ reconciled creation to God.

Like so many jokes and myths, maybe there is truth behind the children's group question, where the answer is Jesus.

Amen.