

Sunday 20th September 2009 Christ Church 9.00 am

A God who cares – Isaiah 40: 25-31, Matthew 11: 25-30

Let us pray

God our father we thank you for your word. As we read your word we can learn more about you, more about your creation and more about how we can live our lives for you. As we study your word this morning open our hearts and minds to hear your word and to respond to it knowing that you care about each one of us. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Quite a number of years ago, when I was studying Physics I attended my first Astronomy lecture. Before we could start to look at all the exciting things that are in our universe, the lecturer had to change our way of thinking about distance. Like many of you here I knew how big England was. If I asked you to walk with me to Somerfield here in Moreton, then you would all know how long it would take. If I then said let's walk to West Kirby then that's much further and I could probably only persuade a few of you to join me, and if I said let's walk to London, then you'd know I was talking complete rubbish. London is so far away, it would make more sense to take a coach or a train. For those lucky enough to have journeyed abroad we can start to grasp just how big our planet Earth really is. So the challenge to our Astronomy lecturer was to take our Earthly perspective on distance and change it to a universe viewpoint.

Well we started thinking about the distance from the Earth to the moon, which is about 250,000 miles away, then the distance from Earth to the sun, which is just under 93 million miles. As you can see we're now getting to some very big numbers and distances that are beyond our experience. So what about the stars? On a clear night the sky is full of stars, some we can see with the naked eye, others require a telescope. The nearest star to our sun is about 25 trillion miles away from us – way too big a number to imagine. Oh and by the way so far we're still in our part of our universe, we're still in our galaxy called the milky way. Within the entire universe there are many galaxies and billions of stars within each galaxy.

So the universe is a big place and I suppose Somerfields is starting to seem not too far away by now! Towards the end of my first Astronomy lecture, I felt extremely small in a mind blowingly big universe. And I quite like this anonymous quote, which seems to sum up my brief exposure to astronomy so far “What makes the universe so hard to comprehend is that there's nothing to compare it with”. So now we have our universe size perspective sorted out, what does the bible tell us this morning about the creator of it? Verse 26 says that God has done such a good job of creation that not one of the stars is missing. If the creation of our universe was an accident, or some kind of evolutionary big bang, as some would have us believe, if God was not in control of creation itself, surely there would be something missing? We know from the character of Jesus, that God is perfect, without sin, without flaws,

and certainly nothing missing. And as scientists continue look further and further into our universe they seem to be saying the same thing as verse 26 – there is nothing missing, we have a perfect creation. We may not understand it all, and there is still lots to discover, but it is perfect.

But that should not surprise us. We heard from Graham last week that many people think that life has no meaning or purpose, yet when I look at the universe that God has created, yes, I feel quite insignificant, but I am truly amazed at his creation. So as we start over the next few weeks to look at knowing God better, we have to see first how we fit into God's universe and his creation.

Just as I have struggled to explain how big the universe really is, its almost as if there isn't a word in the English language to describe the size and scale of creation, we also struggle to explain the greatness of God. We try and use words such as omnipotent, which these days we use most frequently when singing hymns such as "The Lord is King! lift up thy voice" but it is rarely in our vocabulary of every day life. But it does at least give us a word we can reserve just for God – there is only God that is omnipotent. But how does having such a God help us here in Christ Church Moreton? Let us look back at what was happening in Isaiah.

Isaiah had been called to speak about hope in the midst of huge despair. God's chosen people are in exile. They feel miserable, demoralised, they feel that God no longer cares for them and here is Isaiah telling them that God is on his way to deliver them just when they have seriously begun to doubt it. This is a real tough message for the Israelites, it is a really tough message for me and it should be a tough message for all of us today.

Each of us will have our own problems, our own concerns, our own fears and they are so similar to the weariness of the Israelites here. The Israelites thought God was their problem, and I have to admit, there has been the odd occasion that following God has been a big problem in my life. Just look at verse 27 – "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by my God."

Do you ever cry out to God like this? With this sense of hopelessness? God, my pain still exists. Will it never leave me? God, I have cried out to you, but my situation only seems to get worse. You have remained silent to my prayers. God you have turned away from. Such deep despair!

How does Isaiah deal with such hopelessness, and how can we show people today that God does indeed care? How do we know all is not lost? Such words of

hopelessness hide a truth that is clear to see in the Israelites, I have seen in myself and is so often seen in our society. In complaining to God they are saying – well if I was God, this is what I would do, not what you are doing. They are comparing God to themselves.

It is so easy to forget our limitations and we start to measure God's actions against our own. We think we know what we would do if we were omnipotent. After all, do we not all wonder from time to time, from war to war, from famine to earthquake, from funeral to funeral, why does God not use some of his omnipotence and fix our lives, fix our world? Just like the Israelites, we start to wonder, does God really care?

Well for the Israelites, their answer comes in verse 28 onwards, we read Isaiah reminding them to hope or to use a different translation, trust in the Lord. God's timing is clearly not in line with the Israelites, who have been in exile for some 70 years already, and are clearly getting impatient. But there is clear message here from Isaiah, to trust God to know what he is doing.

But what about us? What should we do when we are weary? What should we do when we feel like God is not answering our prayers? When we think we know what we would do if we were omnipotent, who should we turn to?

Well just as Isaiah has a trusting message for the Israelites, it is Jesus and only Jesus that is the way to have a special relationship with God. As we heard in our gospel reading to have God care for us is not something just for wise or important people, it is for the weary and the burdened. Jesus gives us a personal invitation – “Come to me” – right there in verse 28.

Jesus has explained his remarkable declaration, that the Father had delivered into his hands all power, all authority, and all judgment. In these few verses we see Jesus revealing to us God's will and his love for us. Jesus invites *all* that our weary and burdened, to come to him. If we recognise that we are weary of this world, if we feel like God is not answering our prayers, when we wonder who to turn to – Jesus makes it quite clear that *all* are invited to come to him for rest for our souls.

But just saying yes to an invitation is not the whole picture. Notice how in verse 29 Jesus says take my yoke upon you. I'd never really thought about what that actually means for me living my life with Jesus. Verse 29 goes on to say that to learn from Jesus, and to find that rest for my soul, I need to take the yoke of Jesus. I suppose when we hear the word yoke we tend to imagine a wooden bar or frame by which

two animals, like oxen, are joined at the necks for working together, and I think Jesus uses the word here to mean that with him as our yoke the way ahead will be much easier. Just like with the oxen, I can share my load with Jesus. But I have to want Jesus to be my yoke in the first place. I have to ensure I am yoked to the right master. It is no good if I am yoked to the influences and powers of the fallen world we live in, I need Jesus to be my yoke.

So the only way to find rest for my soul and to learn from Jesus is to acknowledge I need saving and to submit to Jesus. Notice how Jesus wants to be involved in every part of our lives – he wants to share our load – he wants to be there when we're weary, he wants to be there when we cry out in despair. Jesus does not want us to be running around doing things for him while we ignore him. Jesus wants be very personal and totally involved in everything we do.

So what should our response be this morning? Well I think there are three questions we need to ask ourselves.

The first is:

Am I weary? In our gospel reading this morning Jesus shows us how to find rest in God.

The second question is:

Am I confused? Jesus can renew us because he cares for us, and over the next few weeks we can learn more about God, to help with our questions and confusion.

And finally:

Have I submitted to Jesus? Jesus wants us to be yoked to him, but do we want to take the yoke of Jesus? If we want God to care for us, then only through Jesus can God be part of our lives.

Let us pray. Heavenly father, we ask that you will take each one of us as we are. That although we may be weary and burdened you will show us how to find rest in you. We recognise our lives will never be perfect and that sometimes we will doubt you and our trust will be lost. Help us to remember that we cannot understand everything you do or don't do. Help us to submit to Jesus, to put our trust in him, so we will not feel abandoned, but we will feel renewed, cared for and able to rely on you more and more each day. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.