

# **TURL STREET ARTS FESTIVAL**

## **Tomorrow Shall be my Dancing Day**

### ***The Right Reverend Libby Lane***

#### **Genesis 1.26-31**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, 'Let us make humankind<sup>[a]</sup> in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,<sup>[b]</sup> and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind<sup>[c]</sup> in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;<sup>[d]</sup>  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' <sup>29</sup> God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

#### **John 1.1-16**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life,<sup>[a]</sup> and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own,<sup>[c]</sup> and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,<sup>[d]</sup> full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."')

<sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

#### **Ps 8**

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

<sup>3</sup> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;

<sup>4</sup> what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

<sup>5</sup> Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

<sup>6</sup> You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,

<sup>7</sup> all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

<sup>8</sup> the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

<sup>9</sup> O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Thank you for the invitation to be with you. I do hope you've had a good week. Your programme was remarkably ambitious and inviting. (I've spent the last week at the Church of England's General Synod, and as engaging as you'll understand I'm bound to say that was, I admit to moments when I thought perhaps I'd rather be at a swing dance [or creative writing or life drawing or drama or tie dye or jazz or improvised comedy] workshop.) Thank you for the imagination, energy, enthusiasm and sheer hard work that has made this festival possible – and for the delight of being asked to be but this small part of it.

We've heard from the Gospel of John this evening, the evangelist declare:

'the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.'

I learnt recently that the Hebrew word for glory is rooted in the word for weight. We've picked up this link in English in the idea of reputation, weighing someone in the balance. I am interested in such an understanding, that God's glory is not simply a given thing but something offered to be assessed. That seems disturbingly generous and risky. The Genesis narrative we heard, reminds us that what is made is good, very good, but that God chooses, in us and our engagement with the world, to have his glory weighed. The glory of God is in creating.

That is extraordinary enough, but then the gospels assert that glory is invested in our flesh, for us to weigh up in person. What's more, the passage from John's Gospel we heard suggests it is directly from that generous, risky self-giving, from the fullness of God in grace and truth, that humanity has a share in glory. As the words of the anthem put it, in Jesus is an invitation to join in the dance. Our creating echoes God's and our reputation is integral to the weighing of God's glory.

The wonder and beauty (I don't mean easy or necessarily attractive) of art for me, is evidence of our share in God's glory, an indication that we are in God's image. Art, in its broadest sense, is one of the things that gives me hope. It is one of the reasons why I do believe that 'tomorrow shall be our dancing day'. Our creativity affirms that the stuff of which we are made is good, that just maybe, our being weighed in the balance might tip towards glory.

I did chose this evening's readings because they speak to me of that astounding good news, echoed for me in art, of the glory of God imaged in our humanness. But I chose them not

only for their substance but also for their style. They are I believe extraordinary works of art in themselves. All three of the readings are fine examples of art of the words, the craft of literature. And I discover God not only in what is said but also in how it is said.

I don't think the arts are just personal preference, for those who like that sort of thing, but something essential about being human – which for me is about the image of God in our created humanness given and giving honour.

Engagement in the arts has certainly been an integral part of my formation. I have been literally shaped by my participation in dance. But those years did more than mould my body. Dance gave me a secure sense of self, a positive self-image and a delight in being embodied that is fundamental to my theology. Years of singing, in addition to being a lot of fun, reinforced the discipline learnt in dance but also taught me much needed humility and patience, and a recognition that I need to rely on others. I was a much more confident dancer than singer.

The arts are what I turn to for pleasure: performance art, visual arts, literature. Depending on how kind you're being I'm either eclectic or undiscerning. I enjoy country music and opera, classical ballet and disco, Renaissance painting and photojournalism, poetry and detective novels. Art is a necessary part of my being human. Art offers embodiment and expression of my personal and relational life. Art shapes my engagement with God. Not religious art, art. It provides intellectual, emotional, relational and spiritual nourishment. Don't get me wrong, I am instinctively rational. I need to work things out in my head. I appreciate the clear precise communication of information – but I need others ways of 'knowing' and of truth learning and truth bearing.

I don't think this is just me. Or specifically western. Some of what I've learnt most profoundly since being a Bishop I've discovered through dance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo establishing identity and unity; through painting in Palestine expressing protest; through music in India extending welcome and inclusion; through poetry from Lebanon exploring dislocation and fragility.

For me, the arts enable the glory of God, the weight of our humanness, albeit in fragmented, limited ways, to be discerned, reflected, expressed, and integrated. Art is both a joy and a responsibility because it has powerful influence and effects change. Art provides both honesty and hope, both reality and possibility. Art can rightly offer cohesion and community, but it can also divide and destroy. The glory of art, I think, is in allowing the wonderful diversity of humanity to be challenged, judged and transformed. Art is one way we know we are, as the psalmist puts it:

'made ... a little lower than God, and crowned ... with glory and honour'.

Art is good news.