

Advent Sunday 2011

*Mark 13: 24 – 37*

Jesus said: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

Lying on the grass

I watched a beetle

It crawled up the stem, all six feet clinging

As the stem swayed in the breeze.

The stem ended in nothing

The flower head long picked.

When it reached the end,

What would it do?

It turned around, retraced its steps

Unwilling or unable to take the leap into the unknown.

Its wings remained furled

Today was not the day to try out flying.

Lying on my bed

I planned my day.

I would start with breakfast, walk the dog

Do my email, answer the phone.

The day ended at nighttime

The light long gone.

When I reached the end

What would I do?

Each day I retraced my steps

Unwilling or unable to take the leap into the unknown.

My wings remain furled

It is never the day to try out flying.

As I am sure you have noticed, as you get older, time goes by more quickly. It isn't really surprising as each day becomes a smaller percentage of the total time we have lived, but it is disconcerting when the seasons rush past. How can it be Advent Sunday? That means we are preparing for Christmas. So much to do, so little time.

The passing of time quite literally shapes our lives. Like the white rabbit, we rush around, but time, the clever enemy, makes us late or anxious that we might be late. We spend a huge amount of time attempting to ensure that we don't notice the effects of time. We want to look as though we are no older, we want society to stay the same, we want the earth to stay as it is – or better still, to be as it was a little while back, before the forests were destroyed, when spring was heralded by clouds of butterflies and children could play in the street. But we are mortal. This world had a beginning and it will have an end. Everything we can see, everything we can investigate scientifically is temporal. Even our thoughts flit between memories of the past and hopes for the future, as bound by time as we ourselves are.

And so it is that when we attempt to think about eternity, we tend to think of it in terms of time, as time without end, going on for ever. But eternity is not linear as time is, it is as different from infinite time as a three dimensional object is from an infinitely long line. Eternity surrounds time, it is the matrix within which time and all that is, was, and will be, seen and unseen, can come and go.

Eternity is God's kingdom. All places and all times exist in him. He simultaneously sees the child of the caveman and the child of the distant future. Here the eternal beautiful truth that is love endures. For God is love. God is eternal.

From time to time, there is intimate connection between God and our temporal lives. He breaks through by the prophets and others who bear his eternal word of love. He breaks through to us individually at unexpected times of grief or joy. And once, just once, there was a unique break through in the person of Jesus, living among us as a man, as Christ, the Messiah, showing us the power of God, the compassion of God, our dependence upon God. Jesus saw, indeed experienced first hand, the destructive human quest for status, for power, for wealth. He saw the cruelty of the way in which we treat fellow people, the hypocrisy of our religious institutions, and the competitiveness that invades all walks of life and he wept. For he knew love, he knew the eternal matrix which gives us life and freedom. He knew that if only we can begin to share in that love, to show compassion in our lives, then we too can be held in the eternal love of God. For when we die, as all things do, if we do not recognise love, we will see nothing. But if we do recognise love, we will find it all around us, joining us, making us a part of the endless music from which creation springs.

Advent is not just about preparing for Christmas, the first coming of Christ, but about preparing for his second coming at the end of time. The words of Christ are our key to the real world around us, not just this little bit, but the whole of God's kingdom. His words are the eternal truths. If we listen to them, if we are guided by them, we do not need to fear either our own deaths or the end of the world.

But in the meantime, we need to practice this business, God's business of love, beauty and truth. Enjoy this wonderful beautiful world, its sounds and sights, the touch and smell. Rejoice in it, share its goodness and pleasures, ensure that no one is left out, despised, mistreated, cold or hungry. Enjoy, but only in the knowledge that there is more. For this is but a reflection of the love that is to be found in God.

We do not need to tread and retread the well worn path that we have always taken, we can unfurl our wings and explore the fullness of this wonderful world, we can do God's work ensuring justice, mercy and the integrity of creation. And when that day comes when we have to take that leap into the totally

unknown, on that day, the last day, we can try out flying, secure in the knowledge that underneath are the everlasting arms of love. Amen.

Mary Bide