

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

As I read this weeks readings, with all the use of poetic metaphors, I was drawn back to a particular shelf of books I keep. I am a (albeit amateur) fan of poetry and I have discovered that the second hand book shop at Trelissick Gardens offers an extraordinarily diverse range of poetry. Each time I go over there, I spend just a couple of pounds, and add another collection of poems to my favourite book shelf.

I have found that some poems are very simple, and some are incredibly complicated. But when I read poetry I am taken to places in my mind that other forms of literature don't quite manage. Sometimes the words are complicated and seem strange, and yet they still bring forward views of the world that inspire, invigorate, and instruct.

One of my favourite poets was a Jesuit priest named Gerard Manley Hopkins. He wrote his poetry while in training for ministry and his writing is just so brilliant and so charged with his faith that you can't help but get swept up in it. There is his thankful enthusiasm for the immense beauty of the world and the immense abundance of God's love in creating it. His prose uses colour and imagery like few others, just like in his poem called 'Hurrahing for Harvest':

Summer ends now: now barbarous in beauty, the stooks arise
Around; up above, what wind-walks! What lovely behaviour
Of silk-sack clouds! Has wilder, willful-wavier
Meal-drift moulded ever and melted across skies?
I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes.

I love this description of harvest as an occasion when we lift up our eyes and acknowledge the poetic and artistic nature of God's creation. We bring into our churches the abundance of colour, the fruits of the earth, the absolute blessings that we see and receive around us. The church looks so beautiful today with our artwork woven into the artwork of God.

We bring into our church all the things that we appreciate and give thanks to God for his grace in providing them... another of Gerard's famous poems says this ...

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold fallow and plough;
And all their trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

The real reason I share Gerard Manley Hopkins with you this morning though, is because his poetry is simultaneously beautiful and difficult to fathom. It lifts, and elevates, it challenges and comforts, and sometimes you just don't know how or why he has chosen the words he has. It is rather like that with the world that God has created, rather like that with scripture, rather like that with our faith.

There are many things we simply can't fathom and yet we still live it and give thanks for it. In our Gospel today Christ talks of the way in which our world toils and is clothed in ways that we barely notice. Who among us watches the grass grow, or the lily unfold? The poem of our creation is written in words that we can barely grasp ... and yet the immense and ample beauty of it lifts us up and stretches our comprehension. We do not have to worry about creation just as we do not need worry about tricky poems. We can let them wash over us, hold us, and move us.

Good poetry, I have learnt, talks of both the beautiful and the difficult in antithesis. Good poetry is unafraid to speak of confusing things and yet give thanks for profound things. Good poetry stretches words to the ends of their limits and couples good and bad unapologetically, And somehow, I think the thanksgiving that we are called to acknowledge in a harvest festival is the same sort of poetry. Here today we give thanks for an abundance that we receive, and yet we will also send that abundance to Truro Foodbank for those who have little. In this action we see that our Harvest thanksgiving is only ever complete when we turn the fruit of our blessing outwards to others.

But standing for a moment and giving heartfelt thanks for the immense blessings of our creation is where it all begins. Because when we acknowledge that none of this is because of us, controlled by us, or owned by us, the real poetry of thanksgiving can really be written.

So, to close, I share with you, Gerard Manley Hopkins poem 'God's Grandeur'

God's Grandeur

'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 not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all are 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.

Amen