

Sermon on 8th February 2026 (Rev Canon J. Shakespeare)

In the name of +God, source of all being, eternal word and Holy Spirit. Amen

Words from the end of our 1st Reading: Genesis 2 verses 1-3,

'Thus the heavens & the earth were finished & all their multitude. And on the 7th day God finished the work that He had done, and He rested on the 7th day from all the work that He had done. So God blessed the 7th day & hallowed it...'

+Words of challenge from my former colleague, Ian Adams, poet, priest and spiritual writer, as well as spirituality lead for the Church Mission Society-

'Where do you go when the tidal wave of stuff coming your way threatens to break on you, & consume you? Where do you go, when the mad accumulation of debris in your head, begins to block all entry & exit points? Where do you go when you need to discover that you are loved + to hear again – as the great English contemplative Julian of Norwich reminds us – that 'all will be well'?

Our readings today say some amazing things about creation & re-creation, offering us a vital perspective on our life + how it is best lived, not least in the context of the pressures of modern living...

Our 1st reading is the first great account of God creating the world, arising from the Priestly tradition of the Hebrew Bible. It is not meant to be taken literally, but expresses profound truths, figuratively, which are critical to our human wellbeing and indeed to the flourishing of all creation. In particular:

- God is the ultimate creator, who brings light and order out of chaos and darkness. 'God said "*Let there be light*" and there was light.'
- Second, God is the creator of everything: stars and planets, objects animate and inanimate and all living creatures.
- Third, God created us, human beings, in his own image and likeness, to have – +this is the critical word – *dominion* over his creatures.
For if we look at the Hebrew & read what scholars say, this doesn't mean control or exploitation, far from it, but care & stewardship of God's creation, neglect of which is a great sin.
- +Fourth, it says that God rested on the seventh day, after '*the heavens and the earth were finished*', and God hallowed the Sabbath day & made it holy.

Yes, God created the world + all that is - & God saw that it was good. God poured himself out in creation, and (at its pinnacle) endowed human beings with reason and conscience, sharing in his divine nature, but with the critical command to rest, to take sabbath on the seventh day, as God did.

But the fact is, as Genesis 3 will illustrate, that human beings got it wrong; we lost sight of our God-given nature, and of the right ordering of creation. We fell into patterns of sin + pride + exploitation – as has been abundantly evident in our news media, in recent days – forgetting the God who made us & gave order & purpose to all that is.

+In this context, to return to the bigger arc of scripture, as reflected in our second reading from Romans 8, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to restore us + to enable His great cosmic work of re-creation, through the life & death & resurrection of Jesus, and through the life-giving breath of his Spirit.

+So we now live in an in-between kind of state, where God has already redeemed the world through Christ, and yet we still live in the birth-pangs of this new age... For the world remains full of violence & greed & idolatry, and whilst we know that God is making all things new, the restored creation is not fully realised – if anything quite the opposite, as we experience human exploitation + environmental degradation on a scale almost never seen before. As St Paul says, *'We know that the whole creation [is] groaning in labour pains; & not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit.'*

The question is, then, moving from the theological to the practical every-day: How do we experience God's re-creation, as active partners in this great work? How do we participate more fully in that work of restoration, which God is still seeking to bring about, through His Holy Spirit?

Well, the key, as today's readings tell us, takes us right back to the beginning of creation, and that action – or shall I say, in-action – that God did in creation, namely his resting on the seventh day. As we read, *'God rested on the 7th day from all the work that he had done. God blessed the 7th day & hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done...'*

We know something important is here, because the Bible repeats it, which is the equivalent of double underlining it with a red pen!

+This ties in with our Gospel & the words of Jesus his 'Sermon on the Mount'. For here Jesus, in the midst of demanding moral injunctions, suddenly shifts in tone + tells his disciples 'not to worry', not to get too hung up about everything, but to trust Him & to believe in the good that God is doing + his capacity to meet our needs: just as he feeds the birds & clothes the lilies.

'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food & the body more than clothing. Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns + yet your heavenly Father feeds them.'

But how do we do this? How do we regain the capacity to trust Him, to live well in the present moment, to live by faith – even as we share concern, practically, with our own & others' material wellbeing, in an insecure world?

We do it, by recovering the practise of Sabbath – by re-learning that essential principle at the heart of Creation, which restores our rest, our dependency on God + our perception of the right ordering of creation, of which we are intimately a part. Yes, Sabbath is at the heart of our sharing in God's work of re-creation; it is at the heart of our wellbeing, physical, moral & spiritual; it is at the heart of learning to live well, with generosity &

gratitude, open to the ceaseless flow God + of learning a Christ-centered perspective on serving God's creation.

As one commentator has written, '*Sabbath rest is a Divine invitation to cease from work, worry & striving, allowing for spiritual renewal, delight & trust in God's provision... It is a 'weekly cathedral', that sanctifies time, transforming our focus from productivity to presence, worship & joy in creation.*' Indeed, '*The Sabbath is the most precious present mankind has received from the treasure house of God.*'

Let me end with a short story from my own experience...

Some years ago, I found myself on a pilgrimage in York, walking (with some agitation, because life was difficult at the time) by the river, wondering what I should do with my life. And as I walked, a man came up & walked alongside me & spoke to me, with authority but also with kindness. +This is what he said, '*It's all about taking time: one hour a day, one day a week- just to relax & stop working. Do that & all shall be well.*' You know what, it was just what I – as an over-worked vicar in Leicester - needed to hear +that man was an angel to me, sent to remind me of the importance of sabbath & not working all the time!

+I've never forgotten what he taught me. +which is why, on May 16th, as part of our pilgrimage-themed year, we will be having a Parish Quiet Day away, to remind us of our great need for quiet, contemplation & rest.

For Sabbath truly is at the heart of our wellbeing, of learning to live well, of being effective co-creators with God, instruments of his peace, and of His patient work of re-creation. As St Augustine famously wrote in his Confessions, '*Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find rest in Thee.*'

In the name of the Father, & of the Son, & of the Holy Spirit. Amen