

11 April 2021

Dear members of Prince of Peace

As you all know by now we are in the Easter season. God has lived as one of us and calls us to a new life as one of his disciples. So with that newness in mind I want to do something different in this week's letter. So, I'm going to start with a small part of a longer poem and afterwards I'll write a little about what I see in the poem.

The Poet Christopher Smart spent the years 1756-1763 incarcerated in St. Luke's Hospital in Bethnel Green. For he was considered to be mad mostly for excessive religious fervor. He wrote his rather long poem *Jubilate Agno* in 1759-1760 but it waited until 1939 to be published

*Jubilate Agno* ('Rejoice in the Lamb') bears the clear influence of the Psalms. But what Christopher Smart did was to take the rhythms and syntax of the Psalms and transport them to his own four walls, in order, not to praise God directly, but in this section to praise his pet cat. Here is a part (26 lines) of the 'My Cat Jeffry' section from the much longer poem.

For I will consider my Cat Jeffry.

For he is the servant of the Living God duly and daily serving him.

For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.

For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.

For then he leaps up to catch the musk, which is the blessing of God upon his prayer.

For he rolls upon prank to work it in.

For having done duty and received blessing he begins to consider himself.

For this he performs in ten degrees.

For first he looks upon his forepaws to see if they are clean.

For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.

For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the forepaws extended.

For fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood.

For fifthly he washes himself.

For sixthly he rolls upon wash.

For seventhly he fleas himself, that he may not be interrupted upon the beat.

For eighthly he rubs himself against a post.

For ninthly he looks up for his instructions.

For tenthly he goes in quest of food.

For having consider'd God and himself he will consider his neighbour.

For if he meets another cat he will kiss her in kindness.

For when he takes his prey he plays with it to give it a chance.

For one mouse in seven escapes by his dallying.

For when his day's work is done his business more properly begins.

For he keeps the Lord's watch in the night against the adversary.

For he counteracts the powers of darkness by his electrical skin and glaring eyes.

For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life.

I imagine that if I were locked up in a hospital for the insane I too would take joy in the simple pleasures that were afforded to me, like the cat Jeffry was to Mr. Smart. The world was created by God and re-created by him when he destroyed all of our ancient enemies including death by rising from the tomb. I believe that this was not just a work of God but was also his recreation.

This past Lent the absolution that I pronounced began with the words “God, hates nothing that he has made.” In fact at the end of each day of creation he looked back and pronounced his pleasure. “It is good” he said and still says. We who gather to celebrate his recreation are invited to join him in taking pleasure from the world he gives us.

Dame Julian of Norwich had a similar experience when she wrote “And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, ‘What may this be?’ And it was answered generally thus, ‘It is all that is made.’ I marveled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. And so have all things their beginning by the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third, that God keeps it.”

This Easter please remember God made you, God loves you (not some cardboard version of you but you), and God does and always will keep you.

Join me in rejoicing that he does so.

Yours in Christ’s service

Pastor Ken Fosse