

Easter 4 (HC-Epistle) (2020)

Last week our Senior Warden Dr. Al Cash shared a quote on Facebook that caught my eye. It said:

"We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today."

This quote is attributed to Dale Carnegie.

Well, fair enough. How often we do overlook or take for granted the gifts God showers all around us every day.

My neighbour just down the hill – Lina Davis – spends a tremendous amount of time tending what is really a botanical garden. I kid her by saying:

"If you don't find it in Lina's garden, it probably doesn't grow in this climate."

This year her garden has been especially spectacular with azaleas, rhododendrons and flowering trees, some of which are still in bloom.

With such beauty 'outside my window', there is no reason to go to Barnsley Gardens or the Biltmore House, or at least that is what I tell her.

Our focus this morning, coming from today's Epistle, is: **Good gifts from above!**

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," writes the Apostle James.

The first 'gift' I want to mention is the one at which we have already been looking – the gift of the natural world. 'The roses outside our window'.

In Romans 8, Paul says that the natural world – creation -- is in a state of travail. His analysis seems incontrovertible. Change and decay are all around us. Creation itself has suffered from the Fall and awaits rescue, just as do God's human creatures, ourselves.

Even so, the natural world, to quote the poet Manley Hopkins, is ‘charged with the grandeur of God.’

*Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings.*

The Lord God made them all.

. . . we sing in one of our hymns.

What are we to do with the gift of the creation?

Don’t deify it, but let it point you to the Creator. Let it fill your heart with wonder, love and praise. ///

But, there is a second good gift I would like for you to consider this morning. That is the gift of the human order, in particular, family life. God sets the solitary in families, the Psalmist tells us.

Let’s narrow our focus still further to mothers. It is, after all, Mothers’ Day.

Some years ago I was in Oxford, England, attending a preaching seminar. During the Q and A that followed a presentation, a woman lifted her hand and asked the speaker:

“When did England cease to be Christian?” Of course, she meant in a robust sense.

He stood in silence a second or two and then responded:

“When mothers ceased to pass on the faith to their children at home.”

His answer reminds me of another saying, one which I am sure you have heard:

“The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.”

Mothers are important, no doubt about it. They are the rock upon which human society is built. You can’t replace them. They are a gift from above.

Pray for the mothers of our land. Pray that God will give them the wisdom and strength to be godly mothers.

If you have or had a godly mother yourself, give thanks for her today. If she is alive, tell her how much you appreciate her.

But, let's suppose, you had a mother, or dad for that matter, who fell short of the mark. What then? Must you let this deficiency define you and destroy your life? /// Certainly not!

What I am saying is: don't become bitter or try to blame that parent for everything that is wrong in your life. Rather, try to understand that parent's plight. Let go of negative feelings and forgive, if possible.

Know that what happened to you way back then was not God's first-order will. As we have heard in today's passage, God is only the author of good things.

In this present dispensation, He does allow His human creature a measure of freedom, to make wrong choices and even to be in open rebellion against Him and His good order. We call this His *permissive will*.

The good news is, that because He is a big God, He is able to overturn evil for good.

The cross forever stands as the supreme example of this. Wicked men put Jesus there. But what did God the Father do?

He overturned their evil deed for good. He used their act to bring about the salvation of the world.

He can do this same thing in your life. Yes, He can.

Whatever happened to you in the past, don't let it keep you earthbound. Let go of it. Give it to Him. Then soar with all the grace He gives you!

So far, we have considered two gifts from above: the gift of the natural order and the gift of the human order. Let's turn now and look at a third -- the gift of the divine order.

By gift of the divine order, I am thinking in particular of God's self-disclosure to us humans.

He has done this in many different ways, but supremely in His Son Jesus, the One who puts a human face on the invisible God.

One thing that has been disclosed, one to which James makes reference in this morning's Epistle, is the is un-changeableness of the Almighty.

Unlike the sun and moon, God's light does not vary with the seasons and the weather. Nor, is He like those Roman and Greek gods who were given to capriciousness.

What this bit of His self-revelation says to us in this age of the Coronavirus is that we have anchor that holds . . . no matter what.

God's love and care remain . . . whatever.

So, stay at your post. Believe the Gospel. Announce the Gospel. Live the Gospel. Let nothing destroy your peace. Be a rock for others. Be an antidote to the fear-mongers of this present moment. ///

God's good gifts are all around us, not the least the three I have just highlighted:

- the gift of the natural order,
- the gift of the human order, and
- the gift of the divine order.

Of course, there are many more. Look for them in your life this week.

And yes, by all means, enjoy the roses blooming just outside your window!