**(ii) Wisdom embodied in Jesus**

We move this evening from thinking about God’s Wisdom embedded in creation – which was our theme this morning - to think about God’s Wisdom embodied in a person: Jesus Christ who shows us what authentic humanity is like, and what it means for human beings to flourish in God’s world.

*The Word = Wisdom was made flesh and dwelt among us … and we have seen his glory.* (John 1:14, *ESV, Anglicised*)

No one had ever thought of the Word or Wisdom of God as being part of the material world. Many of the philosophers believed in a major divide between ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’. This verse in John’s Gospel shockingly brings together matter and spirit, earth and heaven. The thought that God’s Wisdom – embedded throughout God’s creation and holding all things together – could become embodied in a person was a shatteringly new idea. The theological word for this is ‘incarnation.’

Much of our modern world makes divisions between body and spirit, nature and culture, science and ethics. The poet John Donne writing in the C17th about the new science of his day: ‘Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.’ I think the Incarnation of Jesus, the Word and Wisdom of God, is at the very centre of a triangle of relationships between God – humanity – the earth. I also believe that the incarnation is the repair for our cultural splits between body and spirit, nature and culture, science and ethics. Whereas John’s Donne wrote “Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone”, the Incarnation - is ‘coherence restored’: God, humanity and earth reconnected.

St Paul tells us that through Christ all things were made, and in him all things hold together. It is through Christ, that God reconciles all things to himself, making peace through the blood of the Cross. In other words, it is through Christ entering into the depths of disintegration, even to death, that reintegration, new coherence, healing and resurrection are possible, and the hopeful vision becomes one of the whole creation made new - or, as Hans Kung puts it, ‘The Kingdom of God is creation healed’.

I find it interesting that in the New Testament, the word used for pulling apart, separating, dividing, setting at variance, is ‘diabolos’. The ministry of Jesus, on the other hand, is predominantly healing, gathering up fragements, restoring, putting back together, making things new.

So: what of Jesus, the Man?

In each of three of the corners of Trafalgar Square in the centre of London there is a huge, impressive statue. One is of a King of England, two are of army Generals. They all look imperial and important. They speak of power. But the fourth plinth has no permanent statue. In recent years, different sculptors have been asked to provide a short-term statue to go on the empty fourth plinth. In 1999 Mark Wallinger made a sculpture of a small, life-sized, unimpressive, ordinary human being, cut out of plain marble, wearing only a loincloth, and a crown of thorns. The contrast with the imperial symbols on other plinths was remarkable. Mark Wallinger called it ‘Ecce Homo’, which is Latin for ‘Look: the Man’. ‘Here is the Man’.

This was the description which Pontius Pilate gave to Jesus in John’s Gospel, referring then to Jesus’ humiliation, dressed up by mocking soldiers in crown of thorns and purple robe: ‘Here is the Man!’ (19:5).

Life in its fullness is the life of God lived fully on earth, seen in Jesus, bringing heaven and earth together. It is a life, the Gospel goes on to make clear, which God intends to be shared out in the Christian community by the Holy Spirit.

If we trace Jesus’ relationships through the Gospel we find a number of interesting themes, many of them related to the picture of Wisdom we find in the Old Testament. The first, though, is that he lived ‘close to the Father’s heart’. Then, astonishingly, this is where Jesus wants his disciples to be: ‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am’. So part of our Christian calling is to follow Jesus, to find where he lives, where he is at home. One way we can explore where Jesus is ‘at home’ today, is to draw on some of those phrases where Jesus says of himself ‘I AM’. (If you are familiar with the United Nations Sustainable Development goals, you will find some of its themes repeated here):

*Food*

Jesus in the Gospel says, ‘I am the Bread of Life’; he provides food for the hungry and drink for the thirsty. To be where Jesus is, means to stand with the needs of hungry and thirsty people in our world now.

*Health*

Jesus in the Gospel says, ‘I am the Light of the World’; he brings sight to the man born blind, as well as healing to others who are sick or paralyzed. To be where Jesus is, means to shine his light on the needs of the sick, and seek to alleviate suffering when life is at its darkest.

*Education*

Jesus in the Gospel says, ‘I am the Truth’, and much of his ministry is teaching and educating his disciples. To be where Jesus is, means to be with the primary school teacher, with the student in need of fees to pay for her course, with those who decide on political educational priorities.

*Security*

Jesus in the Gospel says, ‘I am the Gate of the sheepfold’, providing safety and security for the sheep. He tells his anxious disciples not to let their hearts be troubled. He says to fearful disciples behind locked doors, ‘Peace be with you.’ And in the Gospel Jesus also says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd’, a rich metaphor which covers many aspects of his ministry, but in particular that there are other sheep from other folds that he needs to find and bring in.

*Inclusion*

Jesus in the Gospel includes the marginalized Samaritan women, saying to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’ Much of today’s world is marked by gender inequalities and by exclusion. To be where Jesus is, means to be on the side of the poor, the marginalized, the excluded and those unjustly treated, and to work for gender equality, inclusion and empowerment.

If in Jesus we see authentic human life, life in all its fullness, it is life that is inclusive and equalizing, looking out to those on the margins whom others despise. It recognizes our human place within the whole of God’s creation, our freedom to make choices and exercise responsibilities, the importance of health, worship, recreation and renewal. The fulfilled life recognizes in Jesus the light of the true and liberating way, and finds a sense of being provided for, protected, looked out for, known and loved, within an inclusive and united community of those who follow his way. It is concerned for education, a willingness to be taught, and a responsive obedience to God’s word. It is expressed in the loving, and sometimes menial service of love to others, within a community of love that bears fruit for the father’s glory. If we look for them in the Old testament, many of these are Wisdom themes. Jesus is embodying God’s Wisdom.

It is worth pausing here to notice how many of the stories we tell each other about nature and about climate change, illustrate the eclipse of God from the world, and the consequent attempts to separate humanity from God’s earth.

(i) There is a story about **Management and Control.**

From Francis Bacon onwards there is a view of nature as a mechanism which we can manipulate, exploit for our own benefit. You get this in Nigel Lawson’s book about global warming: In broad précis: ‘The earth is very resilient; technological discovery has always come to our rescue in the past; we can manage the world for our benefit; there is no need to worry.’

(ii) There is a second sort of story that seems to be about **greed**. We are a ‘market-led’ economy in which something called The Market rules; finance trumps every other consideration; everything, including the environment becomes a commodity to be desired, or given a price tag. In Boris Johnson’s Margaret Thatcher Lecture a year or two back, he celebrated greed, along with self-interest and competitiveness as important drivers for economic growth.

(iii) Then, thirdly, there is a **story of doom**. ‘The earth system is very fragile and sensitive to climate change; we are seriously damaging the environment: Be afraid - be very afraid.’ In his book ‘Ten Billion’, Stephen Emmott’s verdict is “I think we’re stuffed” - well, he actually uses a rather stronger Anglo-Saxon word. How do we respond to overwhelming despair?

***John’s Gospel gives us a different story:***

-instead of management and control: a story of interdependence, cooperation and fellowship;

- instead of greed and competitiveness: a story of generosity, self-giving restraint and service;

- instead of despair: a story of compassionate love and mercy leading to hope.

Jesus is a picture of authentic humanity: of Wisdom embodied.

All in all, the John’s Gospel is a story about love: God’s love for God’s creation; God’s call to us to love our neighbours and do justice in all our human affairs, and to exercise responsible care for God’s creation. That is from where our hope springs. I AM: do not be afraid.

**Hope**:

Hope is a big New Testament word, linked to the incarnation of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead - and rooted in the redemption and healing of the whole of creation.

Hope does not mean the false optimism that imagines we humans have the key to all our problems. It does not mean the blind optimism that refuses to believe there is a problem at all. If our hope is optimistic, it is an optimism of grace. It is a hope such as sustained the NT writers in the face of various impending catastrophes in the ancient Roman world, a **hope in the faithfulness of God** – that the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it – and that the Lord, the Giver of Life, even in the midst of the forces of death, has a purpose for God’s creation. It is the triumph of Love and Life over all the powers of destructiveness.

By contrast, **Hope in the Faithfulness of God** empowers us to live hopefully, and to redouble our endeavours to live faithfully and urgently to recover our human calling as God’s image-bearers in responsible care for God’s creation. I believe our current environmental crisis requires of us

* an ethic of **allegiance** to God, the Creator of earth and heaven, and a recognition that human well-being depends on the earth’s well-being;
* an ethic of **restraint** in response to the sacredness of God’s gift, and requiring living within limits;
* an ethic of **Love and of Justice** in relation to our neighbours - those especially in the poorest parts of the world, and those not yet born;
* and **ethic of Hope in God’s faithfulness** - not a blind optimism that all will work out well, because at the moment it looks as though we are heading for some sort of catastrophe - but Hope in the Faithfulness of God, centred in the Christ who holds God, earth and humanity together, and whose promise is to make all things new.

So the question remains: Can the environmental crisis of our time be a wake-up call to live differently, more safely, more healthily, with more space for the human things money cannot buy: friendship, loyalty, communion, creativity, love and worship. Can it provoke us into hope-filled transformative action –a different way of living, informed by God’s Wisdom? a rethinking of our desires, and the costly restraint that discipleship will entail?