

2021 0527 Thursday after Pentecost (Year 1) Havant

The Bible is a wonderful, rich and diverse library. It was composed by a multitude of writers over many centuries and covering almost every subject you can imagine - and many you can't. To my mind one of the most fascinating results of this long history is the way in which writers often refer to and sometime turn to new purposes material in earlier books. It's especially interesting to see how the New Testament authors - the Evangelists, including Luke who also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, the letter writers and the visionary behind Revelation - used the Old Testament.

We are all familiar with the way in which they saw the prophecies of Isaiah fulfilled in Jesus and used him to prove that Jesus really was the promised Messiah, (just think of all those readings in Advent and at Christmas). But that was only one of the many reasons why the mainly Jewish writers of the NT appealed to their predecessors. After all, none of them thought that Jesus had come to establish a new religion. The OT is not past history but is the living core of the Christian scriptures.

One of the OT books NT writers frequently quoted, and especially in the Epistle of James, was the one from which our first reading was taken. We normally call the book Ecclesiasticus - in some Bibles you may find it in the so-called Apocrypha - but it was originally known by the name of its author, *The Wisdom of Joshua ben Sirach*, usually known simply as Sirach.

The name "Wisdom" gives the game away. "Wisdom literature" is one of the many different kinds of material in the Bible. The English word "wisdom" is a translation of a word meaning "knowledge". This doesn't mean that these books are particularly wise in the modern sense (though what they contain

often is) but rather that they help people think about how they should make sense of this world in the light of what they know about who God is and what God has done, and then of course how they should behave.

Sirach contemplates the wonders of creation - much like a modern scientist. He marvels at them and wants to share what he has seen. He admits quite early on however that even the holiest of God's servants cannot say all that is to be said. It rather reminds me of a book of popular theology a few decades ago *Your God is too small*.

Yes, that's just the point. God is not among the beings in the universe, but is beyond, behind, underneath and ahead of them all.

So how on earth (or in heaven for that matter) could anyone understand it all?

We used to think that past, present and future were easy concepts, but modern maths and physics have confirmed the relativity of these terms.

Sirach believed however that all this does make sense and that if people would only watch attentively and humbly, they might get just a glimpse of the wonders of God's creation, and even perhaps a hint of God's own self. Of course, it is only a glimpse, only a hint, and as today's extract ends, "*who shall be filled with beholding God's glory?*" That's a lovely line. One of the most truly wonderful things about being human is our ability to investigate and even to some extent to understand the world we live in. But however deep we delve and however much we learn, there is always more: that might be something even more wonderful - that we find ourselves always drawn more into the mysteries of life. "*Who shall be filled with beholding God's glory?*"

There really is no end to it. Not only is there always more for us to wonder at, but we have been made always to long for more.