**St Augustin’s Church: 19th September, 2021**

**Ozymandias**

**I met a traveller from an antique land**

**Who said: ‘Two vast and trunkless legs of stone**

**Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,**

**Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,**

**And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,**

**Tell that its sculptor well those passions read**

**Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,**

**The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:**

**And on the pedestal these words appear:**

**“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:**

**Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”**

**Nothing beside remains. Round the decay**

**Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare**

**The lone and level sands stretch far away.’**

**St Mark tells us, in chapter 9, that Jesus’ disciples had been arguing about who was the greatest.**

**Shelley made it clear in his poem that Ozymandias had been known as ‘King of Kings’, and was pretty much the ‘big cheese’ of great and powerful people in his day. But, did it last? No – only ‘the lone and level sands stretch far away’.**

**‘Nothing beside remains’. Power and greatness are seductively alluring, but Shelley (who rather enjoyed his own greatness as a poet) reminds us of how transitory power is.**

**The disciples had got it all wrong.**

**Malcolm Guite invites us to see things differently, as he reflects on the end words of the Lord’s Prayer:**

**The kingdom and the power and the glory,**

**The very things we all want for ourselves!**

**We want to be the hero of the story**

**And leave the others on their dusty shelves.**

**How subtly we seek to keep the kingdom,**

**How brutally we hold on to the power,**

**Our glory always means another’s thralldom,**

**But still we strut and fret our little hour.**

**What might it mean to let it go forever,**

**To die to all that desperate desire,**

**To give the glory wholly to another,**

**Throw all we hold into that holy fire?**

**A wrenching loss and then a sudden freedom**

**in given glories and a hidden kingdom.**

**Our experience as Christians is that it is most usually the ‘hidden kingdoms’ that God invites us to value the most. This is not what we are expecting, or even wanting – sometimes, let’s be honest, it feels as though God has got it all upside -down; either that, or it might just be us upside-down! – oh dear!**

**Not only us, of course, his disciples were a dead loss at sussing what he was really on about. All this stuff about children! They must have thought that Jesus had lost the plot when they shooed the children away and Jesus invited them back.**

**Perhaps, just perhaps, Jesus had a different plot. It’s the plot alluded to by Mary in the Magnificat: “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the humble and meek.’**

**At Hereford Cathedral, the importance of children to Jesus is emphasised with liturgical drama, each year on St Nicholas’ Day, in December, when the newly-appointed Boy Bishop is taken to the Bishop’s throne whilst those words of the Magnificat are sung. (Our son played that role one year!)**

**And you might ask, ‘Why did Jesus value children?’**

**Simple – because, inevitably, they are so much in the power of others.**

**Jesus, the Scriptures tell us, cherishes the ‘aniwim’, the ‘little ones’ throughout the human family; so – not just children, but all who are vulnerable to the power of others.**

**And as for us, we could do worse than take to heart the wise words of CS Lewis. In Lewis’ *Narnia Chronicles*, the Lion Aslan explains to Prince Caspian that he is descended from pirates. When Caspian expresses disappointment in his heritage, Aslan says:**

**“You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve…And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth. Be content.”**

**This is brilliantly condensed spiritual wisdom. All humans are made in God’s own image and there can be no deeper affirmation of our worth. Yet we are not God, and we continually make a mess of what we are given. We need to accept this dual reality. +**