



# God saw that it was **BUEN**

## God Saw that It was Good

### Life

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When settling upon a theme for the presidency of the Baptist Union, 'Attentive to Rhythms of Grace' found a resonance with me. It is captured by an experience that I have shared a number of times. At the start of 2015 one of my hopes was to see a kingfisher. I even considered contacting the Buckinghamshire Bird Society to ask where I might go to catch a sighting. On the 2nd January, my wife, Cazz, and I were walking in the parkland very near to where we live, when along the brook I saw a bird hurtling towards us. As it passed us, I turned and the light caught its fluorescent blue and orange colouring: it was a kingfisher! I was reminded of a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins which begins, 'As kingfishers catch fire ...' and this was exactly my experience. This was a gift, a moment of grace a moment of wonder. Even more than this, it has changed the way I walk in the parkland because now, I'm always watching for the kingfisher. I don't see it frequently and when I do, invariably it takes me by surprise and comes again as a gift, a moment of grace and of wonder. But the kingfisher is never far away from my attention. And it is a beautiful picture of how we might live life, watching for God, looking for God, noticing God, being 'attentive to rhythms of grace.'



This experience has affected the way I look at creation in general. My sense of wonder has increased as I've become far more aware of the created world, in particular birds and trees, and plants and flowers. A conviction that I hold is one

of 'finding God in all things' and this has been my experience with kingfishers, and all of creation.

The church where I am a member is Christ the King in Milton Keynes. We are part of an ecumenical parish and one of the churches in our parish, 'Church Without Walls' has something called 'Forest Church.' It is described as 'a chance to discover God in the beauty of the world around us! As we walk together we stop and share in simple reflections and prayers as we discover the wonder of God in creation.' This is an acknowledgment of Ps. 24.1 where the psalmist declares, 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.' Creation is an arena in which we can practice being attentive to the rhythms of grace, as my story of the kingfisher shows.

In Genesis chapter one, we read that God looked upon God's creation and 'saw that it is good.' This goodness is extended to humanity in God's gifts of creativity. These gifts of creativity express themselves in countless ways, particularly through the arts and sciences. In what seems like a previous life I was a professional musician playing the bassoon in an orchestra, and so it's no surprise that music often fills me with a sense of wonder and draws me into a heightened awareness of God in the here and now. One of my favourite quotes is, 'So much music is rife with rumours of God.' And Hans Küng, a Christian theologian, writes, 'To listen to the adagio of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto, for example, is to perceive something wholly other: the sound of an infinite which transcends us and for which "beauty" is no description ...To describe such experience and revelation of transcendence, religious language still needs the word "God."'

Inevitably, taste in music varies enormously from person to person, and I believe that any genre of music can provide a glimpse of God and even be the means of an experience of the transcendent. But to stay with Mozart, Karl Barth, another Christian theologian, speaks of the music of Mozart as the authentic praise of a finite, limited creation. It articulates the praise of creation in all its aspects, it sings the praise of the cosmos in its total goodness, including its shadow-side. By extension it could be said that all music has this capacity to voice creation's praise and what is true of music can be true of all of the creative arts and sciences, reflecting God's good creation back to God.