

We've got to celebrate our differences. If you have ever watched a nature documentary, you will know how varied creation is. A hippo and a hummingbird are both God's handiwork; very different shapes, very different lives; yet both bring joy to the world in their own way. Creation shouts God's glory through diversity and difference.

That is exactly what today's psalm describes: seas thundering, fields exulting, trees shouting for joy. Creation's praise is a harmony of differences.

We begin this school year at the same time that the Church begins the Season of Creation; a month to pray and reflect on God's world, and on our responsibility to care for it. The psalm invites us to listen to the voices of the earth: seas, fields, trees. All of them are praising God in their own way. We are part of that choir too. And our school life, like the natural world, only flourishes when we respect and celebrate difference.

In the Gospel, Jesus reads Isaiah's words: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind.* It is a vision of a world made new by the Spirit; a world where each person, in their uniqueness, is noticed and lifted up. But in Nazareth the people resisted. They wanted God on their terms. Jesus reminded them that God's blessings had reached a widow in Sidon and a leper in Syria; outsiders who did not fit in. That was too much for them.

The Rule of St Benedict gives us another way. He tells his monks to *welcome all guests as Christ*; everyone no matter what. And he insists that every person in the community has a role, from abbot to novice. It is difference that makes a monastery, or a school, alive.

So as we begin this year, and as we step into the Season of Creation, let us learn to see difference as gift. In creation; hippos and hummingbirds, seas and trees. And in our school; different cultures, different gifts, different voices.

Because when we celebrate difference, when we let every voice have its place, then our community becomes part of the earth's great choir.

And it is beautiful when the whole world sings together.