

Easter 3 2017

There were some wonderfully witty signs at the March for Science last week. Ours from Grace Cathedral wasn't bad: 'Let's take a moment of science' but I particularly loved some of the others. 'Got the plague? Me neither. Thank Science.' For the geeks out there 'Think like a proton – stay positive.' And the so true 'You know things are bad when even the introverts are marching.' But there was one t-shirt slogan that I really didn't like. It was this: 'Too stupid to understand science? Try religion.'

And that, right there, was why it was important for us to be at the march. To show that religion and reason are allies, not enemies. That religion is not where you go to when you want to turn your brain off but where you go to when you have questions that science isn't designed to answer. Where you find a place to ask the 'why' questions as well as the 'how' and 'what' questions. But religion itself also still needs to be accountable to reason. Our faith claims cannot be tested in a laboratory to see if they are valid but they still have to make rational sense, they still have to provide a worldview that is coherent and compelling.

So how does the resurrection stand up to this condition? Not very well, it seems at first. These two travelers on their way to Emmaus meet someone who, by every tenet of science, should not be there. Someone who died very publicly and was even buried. So, not surprisingly, they fail to recognize their new walking companion – the last person on earth they would have expected to encounter. And their eyes are only opened when two things have happened. Firstly, Jesus has explained their faith to them in ways that give them a new understanding, a new perspective on reality, a new way of making sense of the world. Secondly, Jesus has done something so true to his nature

that they can no longer fail to recognize him – he has offered hospitality and welcomed them into his table fellowship.

And what do we think, 2000 years later, hearing this story – one among many of the disciples encountering the risen Jesus? Does it make sense to us? Do we believe it because we credit the source from which it comes – the Bible? Do we doubt it because it goes against what we understand of the physical realities of death? Do we flop back and forth between belief and doubt as reason and faith wrestle for supremacy within us?

It's worth mentioning here that, as the writer Anne Lamott points out, the opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is certainty. No religious belief offers us certainty. I am far more certain of the truths of gravity, of a solar-centric planetary system, of the different states of H₂O at different temperatures – far more certain of all of these than I am of the existence of the resurrected Christ. But none of these certain facts provides the motivation, the propelling force, of my life as does the doubt-filled and wonderful possibility of the resurrection.

This wonderful possibility feels worthy of trust partly because, though it takes us beyond the bounds of science it does not take us beyond the bounds of reason. Remember now that science isn't the only tool we have for understanding the world around us. It is a tool that we can't do without but it is joined in utility by, among others, history, philosophy, poetry, music and art, and by theology. Our reason does not only rest on what is discoverable in a laboratory, it also rests on what is comprehensible to the human imagination.

I have no scientific explanation to offer of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sorry! But I do have a theological explanation that makes sense to me and that is beautiful in the truth it offers.

This explanation begins with a theory that, from the outset, takes us outside the realm of the scientific. And this is that Jesus the Christ, the one who was crucified and the one who was resurrected, was incarnate God as well as incarnate human. This is why his death, among the millions of other unjust innocent deaths, is so important. This is not just the death of a finite creature whose end is inherent in their beginning – those beautiful wonders of dust - like us - who know that it is to dust that we will return. This was the death of the one who stands outside the finite, who is the very breath of life of every living being.

And this death was chosen by God, chosen by the ground of all being. Chosen as a way of experiencing what her created beings experience. Chosen as a way of showing death's true nature – as beginning rather than ending. Chosen as a way of breaking in to – and breaking us out of – a cycle in which violence endlessly provokes violence. Chosen as a way of bringing forgiveness and peace into the centre of humanity's being.

But God is life, and death cannot conquer life, even a chosen death. Jesus Christ could not be ultimately contained within the limits of the physical, finite universe. Just as we, finite creatures though we are, have lives whose meaning and purpose are not contained within an arc that ends in death.

Of course this cannot make sense to a materialist, for whom this material universe is the be all and end all of existence. But it can make sense to those of us willing to accept the possibility that truth is larger than the material. If we are willing to take the daring step of belief in God – and no one but you can decide if you are willing – then we should surely expect God in her love to choose to share our suffering and God in her limitlessness to break through that suffering to bring us new life. New life that is characterized by the fellowship that draws us together to break

bread with one another, as once happened in a roadside inn near Emmaus.

And if you do take this step of belief then you have this wonderful possibility of resurrection to guide and motivate your own life. You have the understanding that God is on the side of abundant life, that defeat need never be final, that death is not the end. You can affirm that violence will never have the final word and that love will never be extinguished. You can gather together with others ready to take the risk of believing in a world that is better than the one we live in today. You can have the courage to go and be the change you long to see.

Do I think it's important that you share the same understanding of the resurrection that I do? Not really. My finite reason and finite faith are quantum light years away from being infallible. And I don't believe our loving creator God is waiting with a quiz to test us on the tenets of our faith at the end of our lives. What I do think is important is that you bring your reason and your faith into the same head space. That your questioning, wondering minds are engaged in your worship and faith-life just as they are in every other aspect of your experience. Don't expect certainty in religion and don't expect the end of doubt. Do expect wonder and mystery. Do expect the motivation to change the world. And do also, without fail, expect, and demand, reason.