

Morning Praise @ Home 30th January 2022

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
cf Psalm 51

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Bible Readings **Psalm 48: 1 – 3, 8 – 11** **Luke 4:14 – 21**

Reflection from John

What do you believe about God?

"I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

So writes the author of Ecclesiastes. He sees that there's something in the human mind that knows there's more out there than we can grasp; there's more than we know.

He goes on:

"I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him."

There seems to be an innate recognition in the human spirit that there's a God who works in the world. Yet he's a God that we're unable to comprehend. I think it's this unknowable aspect of God that confuses so many people. Because we're so tied to the idea that reality has to have a material manifestation, we can't get our heads around the idea of an unknowable God. Yet at the same time we do all we can to find an explanation for the unexplainable. We ask ourselves, if there's a God what is he like? Is he a he, or a she? Or beyond that?

If you sit down with a group of non-Christians and ask them what they think God is like you're likely to get a whole range of answers and in the end no-one will be quite sure they've got it right. Some might even question whether they're wasting their time. Perhaps God doesn't exist at all. Perhaps this searching after God is just an attempt to find someone else to blame for the troubles of this world. Others might argue that science has proved that God doesn't exist. They'd argue that all there is, is the material world that we can explore and examine. Still others will say that unless they hear a rational argument for the existence of God they couldn't believe in him anyway.

Well, let me ask you, how do **you** know that God exists? Is what you believe rationally provable?

My guess is that it's not.

The reason most of us believe is connected with a subjective experience of God supported by historical records or other observations that may or may not constitute a form of proof. But if that's the case, is it a problem? Is our modern desire for rational proof in fact rational? Do we have to have a rational proof before we believe something?

As someone who's been married for many years I can tell you without a doubt that my wife loves me. Do I have a rational proof for that statement? No. She may just be a very good actor. It may all be a delusion on my part. I may just be the lesser of two evils. But does the fact that I can't prove it decrease my level of belief in her love? Of course not. I know she loves me for a host of reasons.

The same goes for my belief in God. I can't prove that he exists. But I have a host of reasons for believing that he does.

Let me suggest some of those reasons. These aren't proofs, they're just clues for the existence of God, of a being who's beyond us and who's responsible for the creation and sustaining of the universe.

Clue 1: The Mysterious Bang

When we begin to think about our universe one of the questions that arises is "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Most cosmologists are agreed that our universe began some 15 billion years ago, give or take a century or two, with what's been called the Big Bang. It seems that the universe is expanding from its beginning in a single, infinitesimally small point. That immediately raises the question, was there nothing there before? In which case, where did it all come from. The universe can't have created itself. So who did? If the scientists are right and everything is part of a long chain of cause and effect, what was the first cause? What made the big bang happen? It could only have been something that's outside of nature: supernatural, that is. As I said, this is only a clue. It tells us nothing about the nature of this supernatural being except that he's not part of nature itself. It certainly doesn't equate with the personal God of the Bible. But it is a pointer, a clue, to something that looks a lot like the God of the Bible.

Clue 2: The Cosmic Welcome Mat

Not only do we understand that the universe began with a bang, but as we examine the world we live in we discover that there are numerous factors that are necessary for life on earth to exist. The speed of light, the force of gravity, the relationship between the various nuclear forces within matter, all need to be within a very small range for organic life to exist. In fact there are 16 major constants calculated by scientists to an incredible accuracy: from the speed of light, to the mass of an electron, to the charge of an electron, and a whole lot more that I remember from my physics lectures but I haven't a clue what they were. If any of these constants were to be even slightly different our world would never have come into being. I think it's in his book "A Brief History of Time" that Stephen Hawking says that the odds against a universe like ours emerging from the Big Bang are enormous. His conclusion is that there are clearly religious implications. Of course this too is just a clue. It's easy enough to suggest alternative explanations. Richard Dawkins suggests there could be trillions of universes and ours just happens to be the one where everything came together just right. That would make us very lucky indeed! Of course we've no proof that there's even one other universe, let alone a trillion, but still it is possible, if you want to believe it. I was watching a TV show about a man who's a great observer of human nature and a bit of a showman in the process. He was tossing a coin in front of a couple of his work mates and it was coming up heads every time. They'd look at the coin and couldn't see anything wrong with it and he'd toss it again and it'd come up heads again. Now it is possible that you could get a series of 25 heads one after the other. The probability of each toss is always 50%. But nobody believes you could actually do it, do they? Well, of course, he was cheating. He was using a double headed coin and swapping it with a real one when they went to examine it. But you see, even though they couldn't prove that he was cheating it'd be unreasonable to conclude that he hadn't, wouldn't it? So even if it is technically possible that organic life could have just happened by chance, without a creator, with the incredible diversity and intricacy that we find in it, is it reasonable to live as though that remote chance were true?

Clue 3: The Regularity of Nature

How do we know that the sun will rise tomorrow? How do we know that water will boil at 100°C (at sea level) every time? Our whole life is based on the assumption that nature behaves consistently. This is the only basis upon which scientists can operate. What they proved yesterday has to be assumed true today. If they observe certain characteristics in an experimental sample they assume they can generalise it to all samples of the same thing. That's called inductive reasoning. It's how we learn. But how can we be sure it will *always* be the case? What evidence do we have that the past will be repeated tomorrow? What grounds do we have for expecting the regularity of nature to persist? It's interesting to think that modern science arose in the form it has because those early scientists believed in an all-powerful God who created and sustains the universe in an orderly and predictable way.

Clue 4: Beauty

Why are we able to look at a work of art or listen to a Beethoven symphony or look up at a mountain range and exclaim at their beauty?

Is this just a product of our genetic conditioning, that this appreciation of beauty somehow helped our forebears to survive and now it's been passed down to us? I can't see it, can you?

When Edwina and I visited Fernandina Island in the Galapagos Islands few years ago, we commented on how there was beauty there even in the desolation of that black larval landscape. There was nothing there that would have helped you survive as far as I could see, if that's the basis of genetic development. Yet there was beauty to be enjoyed.

But it's more than that. When we experience that moment of joy at seeing something beautiful or hearing a sublime piece of music we're lifted beyond the material world to something beyond, to the true source of joy and beauty. It's as though there's an innate desire within us to experience that which is beyond us, what C.S. Lewis called a "God-shaped hole".

The evolutionists would argue that we enjoy beauty because we've become hardwired to appreciate it. We love because we're hardwired to do it for the propagation of the species. We believe in God because we're hardwired for belief because it once helped humans survive in a difficult world.

But if that's the case: if our belief systems are just the product of evolution how can we trust any of our beliefs. For that matter how can the scientist trust her belief in the theory of evolution?

But what if our belief in God were true? What if God really does exist? That'd explain all these clues we've just thought about.

The Big Bang isn't a problem if there's a God who can create all there is out of nothing. If God is the creator we'd expect the world to be fine-tuned wouldn't we? We'd expect the fine detail we find when we examine the human body, the delicate balance of nature, the consistency of nature. If God has made us we'd expect to look at the world that he's made and find joy and beauty there wouldn't we? When a commentator with no religious background listens to a piece of music and describes it as heavenly we're not surprised, are we? No, a belief in God seems so obvious when you think about it.

You may have heard of Occam's Razor. It says:

"When competing hypotheses are equal in other respects, the simplest answer is likely to be correct."

It seems to me that in the absence of a clear rational proof, the accumulation of evidence as we've seen today can only lead to our faith in God being reinforced. It can't be proved but the alternative explanations are far more implausible. **Amen**

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world? **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of intercession led by John

Almighty God, open our eyes, that we might see you. Open our ears, that we may hear you. Open our mouths, that we might speak your praise.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Holy God, as we remember the older and retired people in our churches, we give you thanks for all that they do in our Sunday worship, in our church fellowship and in our communities. Send your Holy Spirit to inspire them to use and share their life experiences with wisdom, humility and gladness.

We pray for all those attending the General Synod this coming month. Despite the difficult circumstances due to Covid may those involved enjoy the fellowship and be encouraged and enlightened by the speakers.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord God, we pray for all who work for peace and unity, and for all world leaders that they will continue to seek for an end to the suffering caused by war; to violence, injustice and inequality, disease and prejudice, poverty and hopelessness and bring healing to the world.

We pray especially for the peoples of Ukraine and Afghanistan, for those fighting terrorism throughout the world and for peace in the Holy Land.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Guide the hearts of those seeking to find our new vicar. Lord, may they hear and listen to your voice.

We pray for our Church communities, that each of us might make use of our individual talents enabling each church to flourish as a witness to the "One Body" of the church.

Help us to spread the warmth of Your love to everyone we meet.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

In our prayers we think of those whose responsibility it is to manage the world's economy, and for those who have difficult ethical decisions to make; and we pray for wisdom and courage to do what is right.

We pray for all who are terrorised throughout the world especially where fragile economies and international friendship and understanding are threatened as tourists no longer visit places affected by recent terrorist attacks.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for those we see and talk to every day or every week; for those we often argue with or misunderstand; for those who brighten our lives and make us smile; for a greater thankfulness and appreciation of those we usually take for granted.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, all the needs of your children are already known to you and so with God-given love we bring to mind those who are suffering physically, spiritually or emotionally, that they may find you there beside them in these dark and painful times.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, your love reaches beyond the grave. At the end of our days on earth be with us and with those we love. May those who have gone before us rest in your eternal peace. We remember before you those who have died and we pray for all whose life is saddened by the death of a loved one, be with them in their loneliness.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God, we pray for ourselves; as we go from this church today to start the week ahead, we ask that in all we do, we may walk more closely with you at our side safe in the knowledge that your fatherly love and care knows no bounds.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be,
that you may live and work to his praise and glory,
and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**