

Reg Weeks

Reflection

12 September 2021

St Ronan's Eastbourne



Psalm 31: 11-16

John 14: 8-12

Show us the father...

Recently, the moon was so bright it blotted out the stars. So often in an urban setting the ambient light makes it difficult to see the full grandeur of the heavens. Not so for David, out with his sheep on the hillside, too far from the village to take them home to the fold at night.

In Psalm 8 he says... *When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers – the moon and the stars which you have set in place...*

But it was another of David's psalms that caught my attention. Clearly not inspired by the beauty of the night sky, and once again provoking the question...



When did David write this? I should point out that the answer must be speculative because although almost half of the recorded psalms are attributed to David, it is tradition alone which makes that call.

However, the words in many of the psalms themselves resonate with the life experiences of the 'Shepherd King', and this week's lament fits well with the time when David had established himself as the warrior leader of King Saul's army.

But King Saul began to fear that David would aspire to the throne, and so he set out to kill him. Saul hunted and harried David from city to city, where instead of finding sanctuary, David was feared by the military leaders of the places where he sought refuge, so he had to hide in caves with those few who followed him. And he was betrayed by informers.

Such a desperate time in David's life, yet through it all he remained steadfast; confident in the one who created the astounding beauty and complexity he had observed in the world around him; trusting his life and future to the Holy One of Israel. He says in his prayer...

You are my God. My times are in your hand...

Generations later, Paul in his letter to the Romans would use that same perspective to claim that the evidence for a creator is clearly seen in the natural world. With our growing understanding of the complexity both in the universe and in the human brain, now being progressively uncovered by quantum physics and neurobiology, this perspective still finds credence as a basis for faith.



Even in popular science fantasy, the month of May gives us the 'pop' saying *May the fourth be with you* as a lispig allusion to the all-important force in the 'Star Wars' series (recently directed and then co-written by our own Taika Waititi.)

Over the centuries, there have been all manner of theories about whatever brought the universe into being, but it was the Hebrew exiles in Babylon who reshaped their ancient understandings to combat the horrific Babylonian picture of the beginning of things. They produced the balanced and beautiful 'word picture' that is Genesis 1, where the repeating theme is summed up in the words... *indeed, it was very good.*

But such concepts of some sort of 'force' or 'power', are a far cry from the role of fatherly concern for truth and justice, for protection of *...the poor, the widow and the orphan...* that characterise the Torah and led prophets like Isaiah to refer to the creator as *father* (Isaiah 63:16).

Little wonder, when Jesus was asked to teach his disciples to pray, he gave them, and all who would follow, the template of a prayer which begins *Our Father...*

**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 this day our daily bread and
forgive us our trespasses as we
forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil.
Amen.**

Thus, we see the gradual transition, borne of experience and reflection, from an impersonal creative power, to a being who is the ultimate expression of all personal and moral values. This sets the context in which Philip's plaintive request to Jesus makes perfect sense...

Lord, show us the Father...

And Jesus' exasperated response is both telling and delightful...

Have I been with you all this time and still you don't know me...! ...Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me...?

John records Jesus going on to challenge his close disciples, and all who would follow...

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves...

Today, it's clear from the responses to the nature pictures posted by their Facebook friends, that many, many viewers cannot help but be awestruck by the portrayal of our environment, from the miniature beauty of the bush orchids to the spectacular colours of the sunset sky. How like David...!

And no one, irrespective of their beliefs, or their knowledge of who Jesus was, can help but trace the results of the 'works' and 'words' of Jesus in the values which are inherent in our way of life, not only in our laws and constitutions but in the human values we uphold. That is, of course, if they should they take the trouble to look for the source. Unfortunately, many don't...!

However, Paul in his letter to the Christians in Galatia, encourages them in the light of their faith, not to grow weary in doing good, but whenever they have the opportunity to...

work for the good of all, especially for those in the family of faith...

As we work through the continuing impact of COVID19 (Delta), may that be a word to us...
