

Christmass Day 2017

A single consciousness, an all-encompassing wisdom, pervades the universe. The discoveries of science, those that search the quantum nature of sub atomic matter, those that explore the molecular complexity of biology, and those that probe the brain mind interface, have moved us to the brink of a startling realisation: all existence is an expression of this wisdom. And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us!

I wish I was better at science and Mathematics, I am envious of those who speak of the beauty of numbers. The philosopher Bertrand Russell once said 'Mathematics rightly viewed possesses not only truth but supreme beauty.' I don't get it, but I wish I did and if I did perhaps it might make me a better theologian! The writer of the quote I opened with helps. If we take the word 'information' for example and replace it with 'wisdom' or 'word' then we might just be able to join some of those dots between the worlds of science and theology – the physical and the spiritual! Information...the how, and wisdom...the why! I can only begin to imagine what it might be like to discover something in science, medicine, biology or physics. To peer up into deepest space or down into the microscopic life that surrounds us. But I would hope that I would be filled with wonderment and awe, marvel at the beauty of it and alongside the how ask the 'why' questions and glimpse the wonder of God. Albert Einstein perhaps the greatest scientific mind of the 20th century once wrote: whoever is devoid of the capacity to wonder, whoever remains unmoved, whoever cannot contemplate or know the deep shudder of the soul in enchantment, might just as well be dead for he has already closed his eyes upon life. Wonderment is for both scientists and theologians, it holds together and is common to the how and the why.

When John says 'in the beginning was the word,' he is mirroring the very first words of the scriptures in Genesis... 'in the beginning.' That should give us a hint at the magnitude of what he wants to tell us...this is a first order matter, this is the theological Big Bang! This is the stuff of life itself, not just David Attenborough type life...but life in its fullest. When John tells us that the word dwelt among us he literally says that God's 'all-encompassing wisdom' has pitched a tent in our midst. But I wonder if our wonderment at this has in turn rolled up its swag and left. If our treatment of the created order, the world and its people is anything to go by, well... Little wonder that John went to say 'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.' We are it seems often blind to life itself.

The writer of Deuteronomy reminds us... He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor

your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. They are words that Jesus quoted in the wilderness when he was tempted to turn stones into bread! They can help us perhaps grapple with the mystery at the heart of the Christmas season.

If we believe the adverts on TV Christmas is all about eating! Now most of us will go from here and enjoy a hearty lunch and yes we should celebrate, it is in eating well that we can glimpse something of this mystery. For John, Jesus is the Word made flesh, God's all-encompassing wisdom, revealed. But Jesus is never called the Word again in the gospel. The Word made flesh takes on a number of other attributes, among them...truth, light, life and importantly bread. And the word was made bread. There is increasingly a movement to eat ethically and that's a good thing because sometimes, perhaps too often, we eat unthinkingly, when was the last time you looked in wonder at your carrots!!! We are also eating more carefully in a more balanced way for our health and well-being, this too is important. We are careful how we feed our bodies. Our bodies and the food we give them should be sources of wonderment; yes the physical is important. Eating carefully and thoughtfully is a political statement too and an environmental one. But we seek meaning; eating has a spiritual dimension too, meals enjoyed with families and friends are nourishing in many other ways. They are Eucharistic in the very broadest sense.

This is why the Eucharist is so central and why on a day like today, not a Sabbath, not a Passover that we have Eucharist. The bread of the Eucharist is for us the Christ child, given for the life of the world. In that tiny piece of bread that many throughout the world will reach out for this morning, is life...we should hold out our hands not unthinkingly, but politically, ethically, environmentally but above all in wonderment; in our hands the material and spiritual meet.

Scientists and theologians need to be working together at this crucial epoch making time in our history to ensure that all people are engaged with the wonderment of both the physical and the spiritual. When the shepherds left the manger on that first Christmas night they spoke of what they had seen and all were filled with wonder! I think we are in danger of losing our wonderment, Christmas is the time to reengage with it! Christmas is the time to reengage with life.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. The material and the spiritual touch, and this has ramifications for everything if we will but open our eyes *and* our hearts. The child has come to bring life...life in its fullest. A happy and life-filled Christmas to you all. Amen.