

Sunday 4th July 2021

The Cathedral Eucharist

Preacher: Canon Professor Jim Lucey

The Sermon:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit:

'What is this wisdom that has been given to him?' Mark 6: 1-13

The wisdom of science is born of a 'method' in which an 'hypothesis' is tested and re-tested until 'scientific facts' are established. This empirical method has been astonishingly successful. It has unlocked the power of the atom, put men on the moon and given us the miracles of modern medicine.

And this scientific method continues to deliver. Since the pandemic scientists have discovered vaccines with the potential to save millions of lives, but while we marvel at their achievements, we also struggle with their 'wisdom', when NPHET and NIAC and the W.H.O. recommend more quarantines and yet more 'lock downs'.

Wisdom is not always welcome.

The people of Galilee did not welcome Christ's teaching. They dismissed it saying 'what is this wisdom?' As far as we know He never spoke to them about science, but just imagine if He had told them when the earth was formed or how the dinosaurs made it their home or how the story of our lives is traced in tiny nucleic acids wrapped in the double helix of our DNA.

Jesus Christ was fully divine but he was also fully human. In his humanity, he would not have shared any of these data with his neighbours, but their scepticism is still understandable, since the 'wisdom' that Christ did share with them was even more astonishing than all of these scientific 'facts'.

He told them that he was 'The Son of God', and that hence forth 'the way' would be the imitation of his life, the 'the truth' his incarnation and 'the life' that of the everlasting in heaven. This wisdom is truly astonishing. And this 'wisdom' is our faith.

Scientific wisdom and faith may seem at odds with one another. In 1939 the Christian martyr and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

“The most experienced psychiatrist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus...” ,

The truth is that Christ understands our disbelief. He recognises the limitations of our human understanding and he forgives us precisely because ‘we know-**not** what we do’.

Wisdom has only one source. It is a gift of the Spirit. So whether it is found by the empirical method or through revelation - the truth is the same. That is why an enlightened faith values progress. It recognises the folly of disregard for science as a folly analogous to the dismissal of faith.

His wisdom increases our understanding. It is not divisive. It unites all. For example, in the brain sciences of neurology, psychology and psychiatry all agree that knowledge is incremental and hierarchical and that it is connected by a vast complexity of cerebral circuits.

Whereas knowledge for facts is stored in deeper and older parts of the brain, the higher centres store wisdom about our ability to relate to one another. Understanding and consideration, empathy and the ability to care, reside in these higher cortical circuits where they are indicative of a wisdom that is still growing.

In this wisdom there is hope. Today’s scientists are learning things that those who love have always known, that the most important understanding of all is of our relationships, firstly with each other, then with our environment and ultimately with our future. This new environmental science calls on us to do what Christ always encouraged us to do...to take care of each other and to care for all of his creation.

Again and again he teaches us how, just as he did in the second part of today’s lesson where he told his disciples to go out-

‘...two by two’ and ‘...to take nothing for the journey except a staff, with no bag, and no money in their belts...’

In other words, he encouraged them, just as he encourages us today, to go on, to build His kingdom together, unburdened, confident and free from anxiety.

We know the source of his wisdom is love and so we wish to stay always in relationship with him.

That is why in his wisdom, he taught us to pray with confidence, the greatest of all environmental prayers,

'...thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'

Amen.

Reference:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*