

In the Beginning.

Eighty-six words! That is all there are in our reading today from the first chapter of Genesis. Eighty-six words that also comprise the first passage in the Holy Bible and I wonder how many people have read those words down the ages? We can be fairly sure that the majority of people who ever read any part of the bible, also read those words and by reading them today we share an experience with, quite possibly, billions of people, including those from the other Abrahamic faiths, the Muslims and the Jews. Those words are important for them too. In reading those words we share an experience with those faiths and isn't that something to reflect upon?



As Christians, though, we believe that the whole of the Bible, including the Old Testament, has, as its subject matter, Jesus Christ. That is something that I have said many times over the years, and I have done that because it is pretty important. So important, in fact, that I'll say it again. The whole of the Bible, including the Old Testament, has, as its subject matter, Jesus Christ. In short, all of the bible is about Jesus, or can be interpreted in that way. Granted it is sometimes difficult to find the connection but, as Christians, that is our task, and attempting to do it is a good way of getting to grips with some of those difficult Old Testament passages.

Those eighty-six words from the Book of Genesis are a good place to start, especially as they are the very first words in the Old Testament and have been heard by most Muslims, Jews and Christians who ever lived. The words can, of course, be interpreted as an assertion that, in the beginning, our material universe was created by God, and that is something that was probably in the mind of their writer. We would be wrong to think, however, that the words provide a factual description of the process by which God actually set about creating, they don't do that, and neither were they meant to. If we want a factual description of the process of creation, then we should turn to science since science will tell us that particular story very well. The words in Genesis, though, tell a different story, they are not science, but are an assertion of a belief that all there is, was, in fact, created out of nothing by God. That there is an intelligence and a plan behind it all. The watchmaker is not blind, as Richard Dawkins would have us believe, but knows exactly what is going on.

Those first eighty-six words of Genesis speak of the beginning and when we read them our mind naturally springs to the beginning that was the creation. But there are other beginnings to which those words could be applied. In His gospel, Saint John begins with the phrase, 'in the beginning was the word,' and, as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, this can be interpreted as saying that Jesus existed, with God, at the beginning of creation. No doubt that was in the mind of John when he wrote his gospel but, from our perspective, we can reflect on other possible meanings. John's words could, equally well, be talking about another beginning, the beginning of Christianity. The event that happened following the death and resurrection of Jesus some 2000 years ago. Our calendar marks this new beginning in its count of the passing of years and begins again with the birth of Christ. The birth of Jesus is clearly, itself, very much a new beginning.

It could be said, that before the coming of Jesus, who came to reveal the true nature of God, humankind, spiritually, were formless and covered in the darkness that is represented by a lack of knowledge. Before Jesus revealed the true law, the law of love, the religious authorities, whilst believing in a God who was located amongst them, believed that His laws could be encapsulated in a written rule of law, that was their responsibility to determine. Somehow, they couldn't see that all they needed was love, not a set of laws for people to follow. Love was all they needed, and Jesus showed them, and us, that fact. And with the birth of Jesus, God said, 'let there be light,' and there was light, and the light was Jesus, and God saw that the light was good. And the separation Genesis talks about between the light and the darkness, could be interpreted as the separation between Christians and those who have no faith. I think, from all this, you can see what I'm getting at.

But there are other beginnings than these. Every year marks a new beginning as we start again as a Christian Community to relive, through our liturgical year, the life of Jesus. Every time we do this and tell and re-tell the stories we find new truths in them. The light becomes clearer as we discover those truths, and the darkness recedes further from us.

At the current time, as we begin to come out of this pandemic, through the gradual roll out of the vaccine, the world has been given another chance for a new beginning and we must pray that the path it chooses to take, follows the path of light.

Mervyn. (5th January 2021.)