

Jesus College sermon, evensong, Sunday 13th January 2019
The Creativity of God, and Scientists – sermon notes
Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz

Going to speak about

- How immensely creative God is
- Science uses our God-given creativity
- How can be released into true creativity

The Creativity of God

Been singing & hearing about it 'The heavens are telling the glory of God' (Psalm 19)

Highlighted by scientific exploration

- Own work in molecular biology – learned how this tiny fragile molecule of DNA can contain information. In each cell of my body, over 3.1bn subunits, 2m of DNA, add DNA from all cells together - reaches Pluto.
- This code emerged from a universe that is hospitable to life – planets form, water, organic molecules form – forces are there to help life emerge
- No problem with origin of life from chemicals & evolutionary biology – lot yet to learn, exciting - but the scientific clues we have are amazing – what an incredible world God has created – he set in place forces that would produce diverse life, and creatures capable of building this college
- This big view of the universe inspired by science informs & expands my view of the God who made it all

– John 1:1-4

In the beginning was the Word – John uses the Greek idea of logos/rationality, and subverts it for his own use –

and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. – later on, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* – Jesus

He was with God in the beginning. – God was always trinity – Father, Son, Spirit

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life – 'Word' goes back to Genesis 1 – God spoke and things came into being. We can see what happened – stars, planets, seas, life – but the 'back end' - the stuff that actually makes it work – is God's creative power – we have no idea how that works

and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – God is not just a powerful creative force, but a personal being who wants to interact with every person on the planet – holy and just (like a judge), also kind, patient, tender-hearted (like a father) - this God is good news for the poor – whether poor materially, emotionally, socially... The great creator is also our good Father

Prov 8 – wisdom personified

'I was there when he set the heavens in place...Then I was (different translations) constantly/the master worker/a little child at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in the human race.'

Wisdom is like a Master-worker - God's act of creation was not just powerful, but wise and joyful – we see a living world that is intricate, interwoven, constantly replenished by reproduction, makes use of abundant resources available (light, minerals, water, organic molecules) – God delights in it

As I went on in scientific studies, & now in my work at Faraday – with an interest in natural history -the more I find out about how the world works, the more I can praise the God who created and constantly sustains it all.

The creativity of scientists

Science is study of things that can measure, observe. Makes generalisations about the way the world is: testable, refined, examined by different people, understanding always getting closer to the truth.

Postgrads, especially, know that science is necessarily creative

- have to have ideas about how to interpret data
- how they might fit into an overall way of understanding of how things work – lateral thinking
- how to test those ideas
- How to make the most of limited resources,
- How to get experiments working e.g. PhD student staying up late to get a piece of equipment working, and produce meaningful results

Using our God-given creativity - **we are all creative**

(Some would say) this is part of being made 'in the image of God' (Gen 1) – reflecting his creative side

Except we can't create from nothing – can only make connections between things that already exist (Tolkien wrote that we are like sub-creators copying our Father)

Science is a way – for a Christian - to honour God by studying his world, understanding his creativity by using own God-given creativity

True creativity

Thomas Merton, Trappist monk, wrote an essay "Theology of Creativity" creativity gone wrong (little but grumpy about modern art!)

When creativity has become self-serving/serving the wrong end

e.g. recent example of human gene editing – creative but either scientific fraud or highly unethical (dangerous, possibly uninformed consent, far safer ways to prevent HIV transmission) – condemned by own country (possibly under house arrest?) & by the whole of the scientific world

That was an extreme example of creativity gone wrong, but we have all experienced consequences of bad ideas, loss of creativity, going down a blind alley. Or enslaved to someone else's ideas

Me – I sometimes do some pointless (people-pleasing!) doing what I imagine they think we should do, overtired & uncreative

Psalm 40 - Stuck in slimy pit – *I waited patiently for the Lord;*

Merton – call to be released into truly creative activity

Genuine freedom of expression can be found in obedience to God. Is that an oxymoron?

Artists often inspired/influenced by someone, and choose constraints in order to channel creativity.

In past, apprentice to more senior artist to learn their style

Scientists, apprenticed to more senior, successful scientist

Could choose God – THE source of wisdom, creativity, delighting in new and wonderful things

But trying to obey/emulate God the ultimate creator – humanly speaking, is utterly beyond our aspirations

But it is possible because Christ came to our level, opened up spiritual path, not of apprenticeship – but discipleship. We can't create from nothing, but can do other things because transformed by Holy Spirit (available to any follower of Jesus)

Not pulling up by own boot laces/left behind if not talented enough - but walking hand in hand

he turned to me and heard my cry. [empowered to do things didn't think could do]

He lifted me out of the slimy pit [people-pleasing, inward looking, too hard]

out of the mud and mire;

he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. [given own voice]

Christ's call to creativity - imitate his way of life, rejecting selfish motivations & being true to person God made me

Accepting my limitations, unique calling, difficulties – finding where I can serve him with my creativity

Merton *"The dignity of man is to stand before God on his own feet, alive, conscious, alert to the light that has been placed in him, and perfectly obedient to that light."* John – that light is God working in our lives

"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."

I left the lab a long time ago so will quote working astronomer -

"Every time I have a new research student I pray... 'If we are finding something true about the universe, then Lord bless our efforts, give us the creativity and the insight to see what you have made."

– that is my prayer for any science student here