

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

The Ancestry business has been booming these past few years. More and more people are enjoying researching their family lineage. Buy a kit, take a swab from inside your cheek, send it off and the result will come back informing you that you may be a descendant of King Robert the Bruce or that your ancestors came over as Vikings and fought at the Battle of Largs! Maybe that is why I love Nardini's so much!

Though I was completely hopeless at Science at school, I have always been fascinated by what modern science can tell us about ourselves and how our bodies function and what makes us tick.

Every living thing contains DNA, and your DNA determines your eye and hair colour, your approximate height, the size of your vocal chords - every tiny detail of every cell.

And DNA has proved invaluable in today's world – many murders have been solved thanks to DNA testing; DNA tests are the most accurate technology to determine someone's parents.

Did you know that your DNA contains the DNA of your parents, your grandparents, your great grandparents and your great-great grandparents?

Each one of us contains somewhere in the region of 37.2 trillion cells, and within each of those cells is your DNA, or as I am very reliably informed, the full title is Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid, which is, quite simply, the genetic code that plays a big part in defining who you are.

And, with the wonder of modern medicine and research, our scientists and doctors tell us that our DNA determines our likelihood of getting certain diseases such as Huntington's Chorea, certain cancers, cystic fibrosis.

Thanks to the Swiss chemist, Friedrich Miescher, who first identified it in the late 1860s, and to the American biologist, James Watson and the English physicist, Francis Crick, who, in 1953, discovered the twisted ladder structure DNA, and promptly went off to the pub to tell folk that they had discovered the "secret of life", the science has greatly advanced our understanding of the world. It is only right that both men won the 1962 Nobel Prize in Medicine.

Don't pay any attention to all this nonsense that is pervasive at the moment that the vaccines against Covid 19 will alter your DNA. There is a preacher in one of those mega churches in the USA, a great supporter of former President Trump, who is preaching to his congregations not to take the vaccine as it is "preparing the structure for the anti-Christ." He exhorts his people to believe "in divine immunity" instead. Watch this space!

The vaccines will not do anything to your DNA, but give you protection from this hellish disease.

Neither does it contain a microchip to track us! That conspiracy has been debunked as well.

Our DNA is our blueprint.

You can hide family secrets, but DNA never lies.

I heartily concur with the thoughts of the author of Psalm 139, who writes,

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.... my frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skilfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth..."

DNA matters. Where we start matters. Where we start in life matters. Beginnings matter.

According to our Scriptures, you and I are created in God's image and we have God's DNA – all of us have something of the divine about us.

Archaeologists announced a couple of years ago that they had made a significant find in the ruins of a church that had been built around 660AD in what is present day Turkey – it was a small stone coffin containing a wood fragment that in the past was venerated as coming from the cross of our Lord.

That such an object was so venerated is not at all unusual – fragments that supposedly came from Jesus' cross are still around today.

According to legend, in the fourth century, St Helena, mother of Constantine, the first Roman Emperor who was a Christian, travelled to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem, located the cross of Jesus and had pieces of it kept in the Holy City and distributed to Constantinople and Rome.

Fragments then made their way to locations throughout the world.

There is no way whatever to know whether that fragment found in Turkey, or any other fragments, are in fact what some of the faithful believe them to be.

When I read the story about the discovery in Turkey, though, I couldn't help but imagine Emilia Fox and Liz Carr and others in an all-time favourite of mine on BBC, "Silent Witness", with those splendid actors in their roles as forensic scientists in their laboratory, checking the fragment to see if it contained some of Jesus' DNA.

The huge problem would be that we don't have any known examples of Jesus' DNA which the experts could compare with what they found on the cross fragments.

When you stop and think about it, though, Jesus does have close kin who are alive right here and now – that would be you, me and all others who say that they are members of His family, the Church.

We share His spiritual DNA; God dwells in the church, and the church dwells in God, and the Holy Spirit inhabits the lives of all who profess the Name of Jesus.

Here is the difficult question – if a forensic analyst could conduct a test on us to determine how close kin to Jesus we really are, what would it show?

How many markers – how much love, how much mercy, how much forgiveness, how much grace, how much service, how much humility, how much sacrifice, for example – would we share in common with Jesus of Nazareth?

The great news is that, by the grace of God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, and by the practice of Christian disciplines like worship, prayer, reading the Scriptures, we can continuously grow in those characteristics that define a brother or sister of Jesus.

Physical DNA tests results are what they are – we cannot alter them.

Spiritual ones can improve – and I find that very reassuring and comforting!

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister