

St Nicholas Parish Church

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021

I wonder if any of you have read Richard Dawkins book “The God Delusion”, which was a runaway best seller when it was published a few years ago now – imagining a world without any religion as a better world indeed.

No Crusades; no Spanish Inquisition; no persecution of scientists and brilliant minds like Galileo and Alan Turing; no martyrs; no religious wars.

No Israel; no Palestine; no Islam; no Judaism; no Christianity.

The world would be a better place without God, argues Dawkins.

And there are many who would agree, especially about all the bloodshed and violence done in God’s Name.

And as for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – nonsense! Dead men don’t rise!

A fantasy.

That was what the disciples thought as well when the women came running back from the Tomb on the first Easter morning. They thought the women’s story was utter nonsense.

That is common sense, isn’t it?

Jesus was dead; brutally put to death.

Rigor mortis had won.

The corpse had been placed in a tomb late on the Friday afternoon; now it was Sunday and those women came running with a garbled story about angels telling them that the corpse had been raised to new life.

And those male disciples knew far better than believe such fairy tales.

Such talk was just nothing but hysterical nonsense.

It was far more sensible to face the terrible fact that the enemies of Jesus had nailed Him. Crucified, dead, buried.

Dead! Dead! Dead!

And with Him were buried all the disciples’ hopes for a bright new world.

Jesus was now history.

And yet, here we are, 2,000 years later, saying that the women were right as the disciples soon found out.

Common sense was wrong – Jesus was alive.

And though I cannot even begin adequately to explain it – that is the faith of billions of Christians all over the world.

A few years ago, an atheist politician was visiting a remote African village where the people made a living from keeping livestock – cows and pigs, and he wanted to try to tell them that he would bring prosperity to them and a better lifestyle if they promised to give up their Christian faith. Their ancient beliefs were holding them back from progress. Christianity was nothing but “pie in the sky when you die”, and it really held folk enslaved in superstition and gave power to the Church over the lives of ordinary folk.

He gathered all the villagers together and he spoke to them.

“God is a figment of your imagination,” he said. “Religion is evil and false and teaches all sorts of superstition.”

And at that the crowd shouted “Kaboola! Kaboola”

“O good,” he thought, “they are agreeing with me.”

“Jesus was a charlatan; a megalomaniac, deluded. He did not perform any miracles; He did not rise from the dead.”

“Kaboola! Kaboola,” shouted the natives.

“Great,” he thought, “this is going very well.”

“The Church is corrupt and you would be far better off if you forgot about all that nonsense, and just concentrated on improving your own lifestyle.”

“Kaboola! Kaboola,” came the shouts of the villagers.

Walking away, very satisfied with himself and the apparent reception which his talk had received, he was accompanied by the village chieftain who was going to take him a tour of the village. As they passed by through the pens where the cattle and the pigs and the sheep were kept, the village chieftain said, “We will make our way back to my hut by cutting through here, but please mind your step and don’t stand in the kaboola!”

Death had been transcended. Death does not have the last word.

And many say “Kaboola! Kaboola,” to that.

But Christians believe that the tomb did not hold the young Carpenter from Nazareth. Such is the very heart of the Easter message.

Jesus is alive – and the implications of that affirmation touch everything. Everything!

Of course it seems like nonsense; it is so foreign to our ways of seeing and doing things.

But, I, for one, cannot believe that our God of love would let evil and darkness and death be the winners, and that is why I climb our pulpit steps every Sunday morning to preach this Good News.

Death is not all there is.

Not by a long shot.

It is no fantasy; it is no idle tale.

If it is all a fairy tale, then logic, hard as nails, tells us that if this life is all there is, that hatred and evil win over love and goodness; that when you and I “shuffle off this mortal coil”, then that is all there is – end of story; that the exquisite bonds we formed here disappear in dust.

But the Easter Gospel tells us, loud and clear, that we can celebrate indeed, that our God loves us and adores us beyond our wildest imaginings.

The God of love who created us in love; the God who showed us His love in the person of Jesus Christ, His Son; the God who has given us so much is the God who holds us in life and will never let us go.

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