

Jesus, Adam and the issue of Lucy...

29/10/17

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

During the final year of my study at Rhodes University, in the Faculty of Divinity, we were taught by a dynamic and progressive theologian, Dr Felicity Edwards, who broached a sensitive topic in our Systematic Theology 3 class. Felicity introduced the contentious issue then and perhaps still today, of science and religion.

For many centuries, for various reasons, there had always been such a strong and powerful divide between the “religious academic” world and the “scientific academic” world. It would seem that the two were never to meet. For years, the powerful church had held the authority of all knowledge and education. The church and the ecclesiastical powers that be, decided what was to be taught, how it was to be taught and what the real truth was when it came to matters of life, the universe and understanding creation.

This was all fine and dandy until the Renaissance. Suddenly, science and academic rigour was pushed to the forefront and scientific proof and fact became the order of the day. This put the traditional church in a difficult position, as suddenly they no longer had the monopoly over the questions and answers over life and death... and so the divide between science and religion became a void that was seldom joined or crossed... you either remained faithful to God and the church OR you embraced the growing secular scientific world of proof and reason based on fact and research.

You may recall a recent sermon where we explored the question of the authority of the Bible in our lives and how we live our lives as Christians in accordance with that understanding. The frank discussion this evening focuses on one specific area of debate between the religious and scientific world...

Evolution of life.

Many fundamentalist Christians struggle to accept the theory that Charles Darwin proposed regarding how life on Earth evolved. The struggle for the

church at the time of Darwin (and in fact, for some Christians today) was that man was seen and understood to have been created in the perfect image of God, starting with Adam and Eve. If life evolved, how then does this theology of Creation be reconciled with science?

Jump forward to 1997 and Carl Sagan, a world renowned scientist, who produced the television series known as “Cosmos” wrote an outstanding book addressing this very issue. The book entitled, “The Demon-Haunted World – Science as a candle in the dark” attempted to show the dangers of ignoring scientific evidence in a world often focussed on religious fundamentalism. I highly recommend that you find the time to source and read this book. It will change your outlook on the role of science and our spirituality...

I entitled this sermon, ‘Jesus, Adam and the issue of Lucy...’ We are all familiar with the story of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis found in the Old Testament explaining the Creation story that we were taught as children in Sunday school. The challenge for us as adults is learning to let go of the myth and symbolism, so that we can embrace the scientific evidence before us, for example the fossilised remains of Lucy...

There have been many fossil finds, some close to Johannesburg, in the Cradle of Humankind, that all point to the evolution of humanity. Lucy is one special case. Lucy was found by Donald Johanson and Tom Gray on November 24, 1974 in Ethiopia. (Interestingly, their vehicle of choice for the expedition was a Land Rover!) What made Lucy so special is that her remains are categorised as a hominid and thus shared many of our human characteristics like bipedal locomotion, or walking upright. Lucy is dated to be just less than 3.18 million years old...

My role here this evening is not to point out a perfect scientific academic thesis that proves evolution to be perfect and having all the answers. Neither is my role here this evening to refute the authority of the Bible and the wonderful sagas that add so much richness and wisdom to our lives on a daily basis.

What I am calling for, as both a priest and a science teacher, is for us as responsible, open-minded and growing Christians to embrace the world of scientific evidence around us within our Christian beliefs. We do NOT have to

limit ourselves to only being in one of the camps. They can be reconciled. By learning to reconcile our spiritual lives with the growing evidence of scientific research around us, we can in fact grow and improve our understanding of God and the beautiful world He created. There is no reason why we as Christians cannot believe that perhaps God created the evolutionary design that is responsible for all life. Science must never be seen as a threat or a danger to our lives as Christians. Let us move forward as responsible, spiritual people with integrity, open to debate, discussions, scientific research and proof. This can only result in us remaining part of the developing world, instead of being alienated and isolated from current thought and progressive knowledge. We know what we believe in. We know who died for us. We know we have eternal life through Jesus Christ who gave us salvation through His resurrection. This is our faith. This is who we are. But, we can also be open to the exciting and growing body of evidence that is actually starting to explain and understand the process of DNA and how evolution works. God can be part of all of this, if you allow Him to be.

Perhaps then, scientific authors like Carl Sagan, could entitle their books as, "Jesus and Science as TWO candles in the dark" as opposed to only science being a candle in the dark.

We all know and believe that Jesus is our candle in the dark. Imagine if we were also able to acknowledge the strength and power of science which could help us to better understand how God created the world we live in and love. Two candles in the dark, burning together, surely are better than one, for they provide more light, as they journey forward into the future together.

Evolution and the understanding thereof, remains a sensitive topic for many people, Christian or not. Either way, should you be open to the idea of life evolving or if you prefer the analogy of Creation, know this, God loves us all. The Gospel remains and the truth of the love of Jesus is there for all of us, no matter how you see and understand Lucy in the bigger scheme of your life.

We are living in exciting times, when the church is being called upon to review, renew and rethink many beliefs and ideas about life and theology. We can either choose to be part of that conversation or we can remove ourselves from the conversation and be left behind. The choice is ours.

Jesus loves you.

He loved Lucy too.

May God bless you this week ahead as you reflect upon your understanding of science and religion in the world today.

Amen.