God With Us

Easter Term, 2013

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God With Us / Resurrection

Rev Dr Simon Perry

Rev 21 / Psalm 148

Every good Christian knows that when you die, whoever is responsible the eternal destiny of your immortal soul will get your name up on screen, and click on one of the following options: There will no doubt be the green button – the Green light is firstly for the non-existent folk who have lived a perfect, sinless life. However, if you have lived a life of debauchery, radical self-centredness, if you have committed genocide, if you have shoplifted, if you have been a 1970s television presenter, or voted labour or even if you have worked for a bank, you can be redeemed at any moment prior to being declared clinically dead – simply by doing an Alpha Course, going to confession, or having a death bed repentance. You can still get the green click: direct access to an eternity of bliss, everlasting paradise in the eternal realm of limitless chocolate and endless church music called 'heaven'.

There may be a blue button – purgatorial option – for those who have committed only minor offences, but whose souls need to undergo several centuries of purging. If you were an estate agent, or a car dealer, or a Guardian reader – you can still make it into heaven, but only after you've been exposed to various forms of post-mortem medieval torture. At the end of it all, you'll still gain access to heaven, even if you won't be able to walk comfortably for the first few thousand years.

And finally – of course – the mouse could hover over the red button. That, after all, is where the majority of the human race are destined to spend eternity. In Hell, Hades, Gehenna, Sheol – a place of eternal torment and damnation run by a celestial Kim Yong Il.

Of course, there is no basis in scripture for any of this… I learned that at 13 years old when a Jehovah's witness came to the door and warned me that there was nothing in the bible that spoke of Christians going to heaven. I promptly asked my parents what 'the Bible' was – and then set to reading it, all the way through. And the Jehovah's witnesses were right – the traditional view of heaven as the final resting place of the tediously well behaved simply does not feature in the Christian Bible. There are one or two passages that seem to come close to saying this – but when you learn the language and context, the bible has nothing to say about human beings getting beamed up into heaven and the end of their days. The bible has very little to say about heaven – but it has a lot to say about resurrection.

This term, rather than follow a specific theme, we are working through the lectionary readings of the Church of England – readings designed to take us through the season of Easter where the focus seems to be very much upon what it means that "God is with Us".

The storyline running through the books and letters of the Bible, concerns the question of whether God can keep his promise – in the first instance, his promise to bless Abraham with innumerable descendents - turning Israel into a great and powerful nation. The Old Testament sees the nation of Israel buffeted between the world's great superpowers – and the possibility of Israel forming into a strong nation looking ever more unlikely. So when Jesus appears on the scene – he redefines what it means to be a nation descended from Abraham.

It is not your bloodline, but your faith that makes you a descendent of Abraham – and you don't have to be Jewish to be related to Abraham. Jesus pointed even to a Roman centurion – claiming that the faith of this foreign leader of the occupying army surpassed any he had seen in Israel. As is well known, by the time we get to the Apostle Paul –

Paul has opened up his mission well beyond the boundaries of Jewishness, identifying Gentiles too as part of the means by which God would fulfil his promise to Abraham. But by the time we get to John – the supposed author of revelation – the promise has been opened out to all people everywhere.

The book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse, as it is sometimes called – it one of the most widely misinterpreted texts in the history of literature. To most people, Revelation makes about as much sense as Lady Gaga's posts on Twitter. Hardly surprising that Richard Dawkins regards it as the insane scribblings of Saint John on acid. But the book embraces a blend of literary genres which combine to produce what one scholar has called a 'prophetic critique of the system of Roman Power. It is a critique which makes Revelation the most powerful piece of political resistance literature from the period of the early empire.'

The passage that we heard this evening, is probably the closest thing in the New Testament to an explicit discussion of afterlife. At the end, we read – it is not that human beings are miraculously teleported into heaven. Instead, it is God who comes to take up residence upon earth. Behold the dwelling place of God is with people! This is the God who makes everything new – the God who establishes a New Order, wiping away all tears, ending all suffering – an existence in which there is no more death. And that passage comes from the penultimate chapter of the entire sweep of literature that constitutes the Bible.

The book ends with the promise that this God is coming soon. Given that those words were penned almost two thousand years ago – it's difficult to know quite what is meant by 'soon'. I can't help wondering whether it is the kind of 'soon' my son means when I ask him to abandon his xbox and join the rest of the family for tea. Or the Welsh expression, "I'll be there now, in a minute." But however we are to interpret this, the claim is not a universal doom and gloom end-of-the-world scenario. The book of Revelation ends with a claim about how the promise God made to Abraham all the way back in Genesis would be fulfilled.

The promise was that the world would be blessed through Abraham's descendants – and those descendants would be as innumerable as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the earth. And if Jesus had redefined the boundaries of Israel to include many who were thought excluded, and Paul extended those boundaries still further to include Gentiles – then John universalises the scope of God's blessing. The invitation at the end of the book of Revelation, is to all the nations – to all people everywhere to enter into the Holy City and the drink from the waters of the River of Life.

This is why the Psalm that we heard is an invitation for every aspect of the created order to praise this God, the God who – on the one hand recognises the pain and suffering that are part of what it means to be alive in any conceivable sense. The God who has created a universe in which the energy of matter, is released into carnal form for every creature fortunate enough to have been alive. The universe in which everything that exists, is precious to the God who created it.

For most people, of course, that is not how we experience the world. Most mammals live under conditions of extreme stress, constant fear – and the probability of a violent death. And yet – to a persecuted minority under an oppressive empire – comes this promise in the book of Revelation – a book written by a resistance leader imprisoned in an obscure corner of the empire – a promise that God will make himself present to his people. What that means, and how that looks is the theme that we will address throughout the rest of the term.

Easter 6 – God with us

Rev Dr Simon Perry

Ps 68 / John 14:

This term we are following the lectionary readings as the basis for our evening sermons. The lectionary is simply a divinely ordained universally applicable system used to determine which bible readings are appropriate for which Sundays – across all denominations and countries: a sign of the church's unity.

The theme that emerges from the readings set for Sunday evenings this term, seems to be the question of what it means for God to be with us. We hear words like 'Emmanuel' at Christmas – God with us – but what does it mean?

In the Gospel reading from John this evening, Jesus warns his disciples that he will soon disappear from the space time order – but he will be replaced by the Holy Spirit, whom he describes as a someone called alongside to come and help. The original Greek word para-clete has proven a nightmare for translators – the various options conjuring up images of battlefields, law-courts, or the chaise-longue of a supernatural psycho-therapist.

Battlefield

If you're familiar with Shakespeare's Henry V, you'll know how a diseased, exhausted and hungry British army had been trudging around French soil declaring – this land is ours don't you know. Outnumbered five-to-one Henry V rouses the English with a speech about the glory they are about to earn themselves – the battle begins – and the French are slaughtered. And at the end of it – Good king Henry, being godly and humble, reminds those around him – that 'God-fought-for-us'! I'm not sure if English literature contains a finer example of false humility and blasphemy rolled into one. Sure we won a fine victory – sure, any Englishman that wasn't here should hold their manhoods cheap, but it wasn't our doing – God won this battle for us, you know – why else would we have won? God-with-us, in this light, means, God on our side!

It is only natural, of course, to want God to be on our side. You learn this in the playground. When you fall out with your friend – you want to surround yourself with people who will agree with you! Not with people who are going to question your behaviour or your motives or your morals. No – much better to have a friend who will take your side. And of course, if God is the best friend you could ever have – he must be really on your side. As one seventeenth century writer declared, I had rather see coming before me, a whole regiment with drawn swords, than one lone Calvinist convinced he's doing the will of God. God with us.

The Law Court

The word paraclete is often translated as Advocate. An advocate, being someone who speaks on your behalf in court – defending you against your accuser. Here – it would seem – is the biblical proof that whatever else God is, he is a lawyer! And as Lionel Hutz says, if there's one thing the world needs – it's more lawyers… Unfortunately, before pressing that analogy too far – the satan of scripture is also a lawyer – the one whose job it is to point the finger at you in accusation. And sadly, the picture we have in all this, is as God as the Judge. Within the context of John's Gospel however, that does not seem to be the court room drama. The legal context is a little more down-to-earth.

Those living in the Roman empire in the first century, and particularly towards the end of the first century – were expected to recognise Caesar as Lord. It was the inscription on many of their coins, it was broadcast through art and architecture: it was the public religion of the day. So when these subversive pockets of resistance spring up across the empire – announcing that it was not Ceasar but Jesus who was Lord – there was always going to be trouble. Christians would often find themselves in real trouble, simply because they worshipped Jesus and would not acknowledge that Caesar was their saviour, the ultimate source of peace, whose presence was Good news and who was widely considered the Son of God. Being a follower of Jesus meant being dragged into court and the promise of the Paraclete – of an Advocate – is the promise of divine aid in being able to speak for oneself. The paraclete teaches, reminds the disciples to grasp the real identity of Jesus.

The paraclete then, is not a supernatural defence lawyer – with a monstrous hourly fee. His job is not to convince God the judge to overlook your sins and grant you eternity in a realm beyond anyone's jurisdiction. It is rather – the ability to show that Christianity did not threaten the empire, but would make the empire stronger – both by Giving Caesar what is due to Caesar and God what is due to God. The result would be a peace that runs far deeper than the pax romana.

The Psychotherapist

So there is the battlefield, the law court – and the armchair of the psychotherapist. The word for paraclete is sometimes translated using the ambiguous term, counsellor. Again, one who draws alongside you, offering comfort and consolation. The trouble is, there are so many different kinds of counsellors – many of them offering something called, 'unconditional positive regard' – which is fine in certain contexts. But I guess, a good counsellor does what a good friend does – and it is uncomfortable and it hurts. They hold a mirror up to you – helping you to see who you really are in relation to others, what you are really like. Not taking your side against the rest of the world who are clearly all idiots. But allowing you to see for yourself who you really are – and not having to offer counsel – because when you see who you really are in relation to others, you don't need counsel. So there you are – three images of the paraclete.

Conclusion.

It is worth reflecting again then, upon what it means for God to be with us. For most Christian theologians, the Holy Spirit is the dynamic within God's being – that enables us to experience the presence of God, and the presence of other people. This is, as John V. Taylor used to say, the Spirit of Communication – the one who draws us ever more fully into relation with others. If that sounds a bit general or trite, then it is worth remembering why the Holy Spirit is called the Holy Spirit – not the holier-than-though spirit, or the morally-perfect spirit, or the righteously-pure spirit, or the perfection-isn't-possible-but-you'll-burn-in-hell-if-you-don't-attain-it spirit.

Holiness is not simply some form of moral separateness, whatever is left in life once you take all the fun out of it. Holiness entails what one theologian called, 'Holy otherness'. The otherness of another person. A person whose mere existence hangs a question mark over our certainties and convictions and beliefs. Otherness is an alternative view of the world. Otherness is a disruptive, disturbing presence that lies beyond the boundaries of all that is familiar, and safe and secure. Otherness threatens all the we treasure, all for which we strive, everything for which we hope.

So to experience the Holy Spirit – is to engage with the other people and with the world beyond me, in such a way as to be changed by it. To be full of the Holy Spirit is to be genuinely open to that which is genuinely other. To worship in the Holy Spirit, is to be open in the most radical way.

God with us? This is not a god who simply secures our position in the world. Instead, this is a God whose being is expressed in a man who had no position in the world. What does it mean for that God to be with us?

Ascension and Pentecost should go a long way to answering that question...

Pentecost

Prof. Morna D. Hooker

'How do you see the Holy Spirit of God?'

That question forms the opening line of a poem written by Stevie Smith.

She continued:

'How do you see the Holy Spirit of God?

I see him as the holy spirit of good. But I do not think we should talk about spirits. I think we should call good, good.

But it is a beautiful idea, is it not?

And productive of good? . . . Yes, it is a beautiful idea, one of the most Beautiful ideas Christianity has ever had,

. . . A beautiful fairy story.'

I first came across that poem when it was printed, about 50 years ago, in the pages of the Guardian. Why it was there I cannot now remember, and these days I cannot imagine any newspaper publishing it. Stevie Smith may have been puzzled by the idea of God's Holy Spirit, but the readers of the Guardian today might well look blank at the very notion of the Holy Spirit – or, even worse, the Holy Ghost.

Today, on Whitsunday, we heard one version of the story to which Stevie Smith was alluding, and which she described as 'a beautiful fairy story'. A fairy story is indeed nothing more than a 'beautiful idea', having no basis in history, for as we all know, they take place 'once upon a time'. So what of Luke's account of the disciples experiencing the coming of the Holy Spirit? Was it, as Stevie Smith said, a 'fairy story'? Or is it an account of something that was really experienced by Jesus' first followers on the first Whitsunday? And if so, what was it all about?

Well, according to Luke, 'there came from the sky what sounded like a strong, driving wind, a noise which filled the whole house where they were sitting'. What was significant about this wind? To answer that question, we need to go back to the Greek word for 'spirit' – pneuma – or even further back, to the Hebrew word ruah. Both words are ambiguous; they can mean not only 'spirit', but 'wind', and 'breath'. Think back to the opening words of Genesis; in the beginning, we are told, 'the earth was a vast waste'. In the translation we use here in chapel, we then read that 'the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water'. Another translation speaks of 'a wind from God' sweeping 'over the face of the waters'. There's a parallel idea, though the vocabulary is different, in the next chapter, where we hear how God made a man out of dust, and breathed life into his nostrils. You may be inclined to dismiss these accounts as more 'fairy stories', but think what they're trying to tell us. The Spirit of God is seen in the

creative force which formed the universe, and in the breath of life which distinguish men and women from the molecules from which they are formed. And this Spirit, declares Luke, suddenly came on the disciples in a new way, and more or less bowled them over.

Pneuma means spirit, wind, breath, but it signifies power. Think of pneumatic drills. 'The sound filled the house' said Luke, and no wonder! We're talking about a creative force – and a force that can be as destructive as it is creative – a force that will certainly have knocked them for six. We're talking about the power of God himself.

You have, I hope, a copy before you of a picture of a stained glass window in Ely Cathedral, a window which is meant to portray what happened on the first Whitsunday. It is, you will agree, a glorious splash of colour – but that is about all that can be said for it, for it gets every detail of Luke's story wrong. Where are the signs of the strong wind that rushed through the house? Surely the disciples' hair should be all awry? But no, they all look as if they have just emerged from the hairdresser's, with not a single hair astray.

Well, maybe it's difficult to portray a violent wind, unless you have some trees bent over in the background, but fire should surely have been easier. 'Flames like tongues of fire . . . rested on each one', says Luke. If you look carefully at the picture you will indeed see tiny blobs on each head, though I can't really decide whether they look like the tiny flames you get from birthday cake candles or giant raindrops. Luke, I think, intends us to think of a dramatic experience – a fire that rages without consuming, but which transforms the disciples. I certainly don't get the impression from the picture that the flames filled the room – or, indeed, had any effect whatever, for these are almost invisible.

Why should the disciples experience God's Spirit as a fire? Think of another significant story in the Old Testament – the story of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. Moses, feeding his sheep in the wilderness, saw a fire blazing in the bush – but the bush remained intact. Like the wind, the fire was a symbol of the presence – and the power – of God. Wind and fire are both forces of nature which, untamed, can destroy; but both can be used creatively and constructively. No wonder that the disciples, aware of the presence of God in a new way, should feel it like the presence of fire.

One of the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah, spoke of 'a raging fire in my bones'. He was referring to the fact that God had given him a message to give to his people, and he was on fire until he delivered it. That's the kind of thing that Luke has in mind, I think, because the next thing he tells us is that 'the Spirit gave them power of utterance', and they all began to speak in tongues.

Now normally when we hear of people talking in tongues we think of them speaking gibberish. That was certainly the way that Paul understood it. Though he refers to the ability to speak in tongues as a spiritual gift, he doesn't seem to be very impressed by it. What's the good of speaking in tongues, he asked, if nobody understands what you're saying? That won't help the community. You need someone to interpret what you're saying.

Luke seems to be thinking of something very different, for what he tells us is that the disciples began to speak in other languages, and people who spoke those languages and who heard them speak understood what they were saying. And what they were saying was, of course, the story of Jesus, of his death and resurrection, and of God's promise to be with all who responded to this message. In other words, what Luke is describing is more like what we might call 'preaching', but with an instantaneous translation system built in! A bit more of the fairy story, you ask?

Or is it perhaps Luke's way of saying that at Whitsun the disciples were empowered to embark on a mission to the nations, so that, in time, everyone heard the good news?

For our first reading this evening, we heard the story of the tower of Babel.

It tells how men and women grew too big for their boots, and decided to build a tower that would reach into heaven, so they began to build a kind of prototype of the shard. They didn't get very far, however, for God apparently objected to his territory being invaded, and he knocked their tower down, like a pile of children's bricks. Worse still, he 'made a babble of their language'. Whereas before, they had all spoken the same language, they now spoke a great variety, and could no longer understand each other. And of course, when they could no longer understand each other, they started fighting one another and killing one another.

Luke's story is intentionally the very opposite of this old fable. The Spirit of God unites people. They hear others speaking, and understand. So though Luke and Paul understand the gift of tongues in different ways, they certainly agree about the significance of the gift of the Spirit. The one Spirit of God brings men and women together. Paul has a lot to say about this. The one Spirit unites men and women into one body. The Spirit brings believers different gifts, not for their own sake, but for the sake of others. And the greatest gift of all is the gift of love, because that binds them together. Babel scattered men and women and divided them from each other. The Spirit of God brings them together.

And you will notice that once again the stained glass window gets it wrong.

The disciples' mouths are firmly shut – they are not saying anything to anybody in any language. They are making no attempt to spread the good news – instead, they are gathered together in a kind of holy huddle, looking, either at one another, or vacantly into the middle distance.

If you are observant, you will have noted that the College is today flying a flag. I am tempted to suggest that the Head Porter ordered it to be flown to mark the fact that today is my birthday, but that of course is not the explanation – no, it is because today is Whitsunday, and Whitsunday is often described as the birthday of the Church – the day when the Church began. So today is a day of celebration! According to the University statutes, today is a scarlet day, which means that all doctors should be wearing scarlet. The chaplain and I decided to compromise, and wear hoods. But that's not because we wish to vaunt our learning but because we want to celebrate: to celebrate the message of Whitsun. A fairy story? No! Because fairy stories are simply beautiful stories about what might have happened, once upon a time. But this is a story of how men and women were fired to go out to preach – and live – the gospel story. It's a story, not simply about the past, but about what is still true today. Today is definitely a day to have a party, a day to celebrate. For the message of Whitsun is that God is with us, bringing us life, empowering us, and uniting us with others in love.

Ascension Day

Dr Simon Perry

Rev 22

Jesus has been crucified, he has risen from the dead – and for several weeks, he has been knocking around in the company of the disciples. And Ascension Day is when we remember being taken up into heaven… I would love to have seen how this happened. When you glance through the history of art on this subject, for the most part, the scene is pictured as Jesus being beamed up into heaven like Captain Kirk onto the Enterprise. But regardless of how this happened, what has always fascinated me is what happened next…

Once the drum-roll is over, the smoke had cleared, the trumpets have silenced – and Jesus was gone – what happened next? What did the disciples do, once Jesus had been beamed up back into heaven? Where's the history of great art depicting the disciples rolling their thumbs, scratching their heads, and asking such questions as: 'what was that'; 'he said he'd be back, right; and above all, "what shall we do now?"

Whatever else it means – the Ascension means that God is not with us. At least not in the way we were expecting, not in human form, not in the way that a normal person is present. This term, we are exploring what God with us means – and following the lectionary readings.

The lectionary is a table of set bible readings for each day of the year, designed to get every Christian in Christendom to be worshipping in harmony, hearing similar sermons and following the seasons of the Christian year. But as one of our theology professors pointed out a couple of weeks ago, we hit a curious issue with today's reader. The reading from Revelation ends with the warning that if any words of this book are omitted then all the plagues from this book will be visited upon them – and then, the lectionary omits that verse from the reading.

The reading focuses upon the final return of Jesus… Sure he is gone, but he said he'd be back – and the book of Revelation speaks about what happens when Jesus returns. As part of his return, it seems, there are various groups of people who will be excluded from the new Jerusalem… The dogs, the sorcerers, the fornicators, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. So… the lectionary omits all that negativity and focuses upon the good news of the return of Jesus.

I'm not sure why – but one problem is that if you read Scripture carefully – and follow the logic of how our true nature is identified – then most human beings who ever lived can be assigned a place in that small group of nasty people who are excluded when Jesus returns. No wonder the lectionary omits all the nasty stuff that will happen to them. God with us, in this light, is bad news – it's when Jesus comes back to punish anyone who has not lived a sinless life.

So when we stop to consider what God with us means, it seems to mean that while Jesus is not here, life goes on as normal, but when Jesus returns at the end of the space-time continuum – if we thought things were bad already, then he brings with him eternal damnation. But for now – we are safe, because he isn't here! It's this mentality that leads to the creation of that famous bumper sticker: Jesus is Coming – Look busy! Hardly surprising then, that beliefs concerning the presence of God and the second coming of Christ have fallen into disfavour.

The doctrine of the ascension then, means that Jesus is not present. The world is full of horrible stuff happening all the time, and if an omnipresent, omnipotent, and omni-benevolent god were walking among us – then the state of the world would be proof of divine incompetence of the highest order.

The doom and gloom of the world rarely needs restating:

Firstly, this week it has been announced that for the first time certainly in 800 000 years (and probably for 4 million years), co2 levels have risen above 400 parts per million – putting us into a dangerous new ecological age.

Secondly, economically, the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund warned the British chancellor that UK's austerity measures look too aggressive, and others that our economy is flat-lining and living standards falling.

And Thirdly, as if this were not bad enough, the boy-band JLS – have announced that they are to split.

In a world of such doom and gloom, where do we see the presence of the God who loved the world so much he gave his only son? Of course, Christian apologists go to work pointing at the wonder of the universe, and the beauty of the sunset, and the miraculous of the everyday, and the unlikelihood of life being possible in our universe. And of course, atheist apologists rightly ask why, if there is a loving and all-powerful god, there is also bone cancer in children, pointless death on a daily basis, and a total lack of any proof anywhere for the existence of a loving God.

Here it is easy to agree with the atheists – but the god imagined both by the apologists of new atheism or by modernist Christianity, seems to have a particular way of being present in the universe. As though God could or should be present with all power at his disposal to change everything here and now. For sure – part of what is recognised on the ascension is that Jesus isn't here! And theologically, that makes good sense.

Jesus is not simply 'there', like an object alongside other objects in the world. He never did parade himself through our daily world anyway- as an omnipotent wand-waving Jewish superhero. The Jesus of the gospels did not overthrow Herod, he did not defeat the evil Roman empire, he did not end suffering, or violence or death. In fact, with reckless disregard for Health and Safety, he ended up carrying his cross – and encouraging his followers to do likewise. The Jesus of history never alluded to an omnipotent power to change the world by supernatural means – instead, he offered an alternative story of what it means to be human, of what it means to change the world, of what it means to exert force, and seek justice, and build peace.

Not by the strength of arms, by military, or economic, or charismatic power. Instead, he invited his followers to experience the world differently, to embody radical, self-giving love – he invited his followers to wait and see what that would do to the world around them… That is the way that Jesus made this God present – not a supernatural god who embodied pagan notions of power. Instead, he invites them into a way of being, into a way of engaging with others – and the consequences were that God, and nature and human nature all reacted in surprising and unexpected ways.

So when this Jesus disappears from earth – he leaves his disciples with a way of being, and way of relating to one another and the world around them, ways of being that access the most down-to-earth, natural, world-changing,

wonder-working, life affirming stuff of the cosmos. No doubt, this will be brought out more fully by Professor Hooker who will speak on Pentecost next week, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

But for now, on Ascension Day – we are invited to reflect upon the absence of God. That is, the absence of a god we can get our hands on, a god we can objectify and fetishize, the absence of a God whose power is just more of the same old human power multiplied into infinity, the absence of a God who can be manipulated into answering prayers the way we want them answered, the absence of a God who brings about the justice that favours us rather than favours humanity.

Jesus, by withdrawing beyond human reach, and human sight – highlights the true nature of the sheer otherness of this God. The reminder that every belief about God is a human projection, the reminder that every statement about God can be tentative at best, the reminder that every claim to have God on your side is empty rhetoric. The withdrawal of God beyond the reach of human manipulation is what we celebrate today – but that does not mean the absence of God from our universe. Instead, it reminds us that God is universally present particular ways.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is the starting point for speaking positively about what the presence of God means – and that is a subject we welcome next week.

Divine Schizophrenia

Dr Simon Perry

According to 'the church', the body of Christ is a way of describing the presence of Jesus here on earth. The church, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, continues the words and actions of Jesus, now that Jesus isn't officially here any more. But of course, he is here, because the church is the body of Christ.

What this means, of course, is that this down-to-earth, all-too-human institution, is actually the manifestation of divine action. It means that what the church does – is what Jesus himself would do if he were here. As the centuries since Pentecost have passed, we know that the church itself eventually was favoured by the Roman empire – and displaced the old gods Rome. The church became the official religion – the body of Christ became an overtly political structure, and official Christianity held Western Europe together for over a thousand years. So during that time, a nation's church leaders were indistinguishable from a nation's political leaders. The body of Christ, gradually became a human institution that – no matter what it did – it could assume divine approval.

If a nation's leaders go to war; if a nation slaughters protestors; if a nation persecutes minorities; controls the populace, imposes crippling taxes and endorses all manner of atrocities – you cannot ever question its actions because, the church is the body of Christ, and its leaders represent Christ. If our actions seem unfair, let's call it 'Tough Love'. It takes little imagination in the 21st century, to look at the history of the church over the last 1500 years, and ask what kind of a god the church has embodied? Does the body of Christ as it appears through history, bear any resemblance to the Christ of scripture? In innumerable ways, of course it doesn't – anyone with half a brain will find in the pages of history – infinite examples of ecclesiastical nincompoopery… Once was embodied in the church, the personality of Christ underwent a disastrous character transformation – eventually morphing into the exact opposite of the Christ portrayed in Scripture!

Perhaps the creeds that we use so regularly make the point most clearly. These creeds, it must be remembered, were penned in the 4th century – as part of a process to provide the Roman empire with ideological unity. If inhabitants of all corners of the empire are busy reciting this creed– it is easier to maintain the ideologies that keep the imperial machine running smoothly. The emperor is a gift from god, Christianity preaches submission to heaven-blessed authorita, so let's have some creeds to dictate sound belief, thank God for our leaders and everybody's happy.

But strictly speaking, the creeds – which are still recited in churches around the world –represent a Christ that has little in common with the Christ of Scripture.

Although there is nothing in the creed that contradicts scripture, the elements which are included and excluded resulted in a document which – if taken as a summary of Christian faith – is wildly at odds with Christian Scriptures. The most gaping, and largely unacknowledged blunder, is that the creed emphasises the judgement of God but is silent about the love of God – which the scriptures portray of this God's primal personality trait. Nor do the problems end there. The Jesus who proclaimed a God whose power is expressed in weakness, whose presence subverts the top-down dynamic of wealth and politics, who welcomed the 'nobodies' and critiqued the powerful, is quietly dismissed from the Imperial Creeds. The character of the God who sides with the poor, who welcomes the outsider, who reveals himself in self-giving love, is beyond the interest of the very creed that claims to outline true belief.

Between the virgin birth and the crucifixion, Jesus – according to the creed – neither said nor did anything crucial for the Christian faith. The result is a depoliticised view of God, casting him as a divinity who is happy to leave the business of politics to others while he focuses upon salvation. Whilst salvation itself had long been a political issue, with Roman emperors hailed as bringing salvation – the Creed pushes salvation away from real life and towards the afterlife so it could become a series of spiritual transactions distinct from daily life. Sure, we can recite the creeds without being unbiblical – but, as one Jesuit priest once told me, the best they can offer is a negative, corrective version of faith to safeguard us against some particular historical heresies.

Scripture, offers an alternative understanding of what it means to be the body of Christ. Here is the unnerving reminder that the Christ who said, "follow me," was on his way to the cross. In this light, the body of Christ is the tortured, mutilated corpse of a political criminal, epitomising failure and shame. If this, is the body in which Christ lives by his spirit, then the church that embodies Christ, follows this Christ into the abyss. For Eagleton, Jesus' descent into hell was a descent into precisely this absurdity, into an alternative power dynamic.

Only through such an openness to our own finitude, our frailty, our mortality, only by preserving …steadfast fidelity to failure… can any human power prove durable. Only through this impossible, stonily disenchanted realism, staring the medusa's head, (of… the crucifixion) full in the face, can any sort of resurrection be possible. Only by accepting this as the very last word, seeing everything else as so much sentimentalist garbage, ideological illusion, false utopia, bogus consolation, ludicrously upbeat idealism, only then may it prove not to be quite the last word after all. The New Testament is a brutal destroyer of human illusions. If you follow Jesus and you don't end up dead, it appears you have some explaining to do.

So – when the church celebrates communion – we are not simply remembering a gruesome and bloody death because that's the surest route to heaven – if only we can perform the mental gymnastics required to con ourselves into 'believing what we know ain't true'. Instead, we are not assuming that Christ is on our side, but committing ourselves to be on his.

This is true in the readings we have heard this week: the notion of welcoming the stranger – is not simply the polite requirement to show hospitality. Jesus himself welcomed a key representative of an occupying army – a Roman Centurion – and showed how this repulsive gentile oppressor embodied more faith than any faithful, torah-reading, beard-sporting, Jew in Israel. In this sense, the stranger is someone whose very presence stands over against you – someone whose mere existence places an enormous question mark over all you thought you knew about the world. Welcoming the stranger is a theme that beats its rhythm throughout the writings of scripture, because it is entertaining such people, who embody such radical otherness, that we encounter something of the holy otherness of God himself. He who welcomes these children, says Jesus, welcomes me. He who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. What you did for the least of these, you did for me…

To be the body of Christ, is – first and foremost – to embody this openness to the other, this readiness to welcome the stranger, this ability to engage well with that which has the capacity to disrupt and disturb who you really are. Because, by doing that – we emulate something important about who Christ is, we experience something crucial about who God is, and we receive ourselves back from that person as a different person. This attitude, is the exact opposite of the belief that our ways and our beliefs and our decisions are automatically heaven-blessed because we are the body of Christ. This readiness to welcome the stranger, the outsider, is to embrace radical insecurity, to accept the provisional nature of our belief, to recognise the vulnerability of all we treasure, and to engage with what scripture means by holiness.

Of course, the creeds are silent about this fundamental aspect of what it means to be part of the body of Christ – and to share in the body of Christ. There is a sense in which – by sharing in this meal, we not only remember Jesus' death and resurrection, but that we enter into something of what that death and resurrection means in practical and political terms.

This meal that we are soon to share, is where we expect to experience the otherness of God, in the otherness of one another. And it is by welcoming this down to earth Christ – that we become this down-to-earth Christ to one another, and thereby become what scripture means by the body of Christ.

Offering Care

Dr Brian Sloan

I've spent almost six years of my life, too long perhaps, thinking about the following scenario. An elderly person is finding it difficult to look after himself. A family member, friend or neighbour therefore decides to help with things such as shopping and cooking. In time the elderly person becomes increasingly dependent on his informal carer, who helps him with increasingly personal tasks. The carer ultimately has to change her working hours in order to look after the elderly person. Indeed, one estimate suggests that such carers lose an average of £11,000 per year as a result of their caring responsibilities.[1] The carer also suffers health problems, as many carers do.[2] The elderly care recipient realises this, and might make some sort of indication that the carer will receive something out of his estate in return for her efforts. But when the care recipient dies, it becomes clear that the carer has not been left anything in the care recipient's will. This could be as a result of a deliberate decision on the part of the care recipient, or it could be accidental.

This scenario is not an unusual one. The 2011 census recorded 5.8 million informal carers for elderly and disabled people in England and Wales,[3] a significant increase from the 5.2 million recorded just ten years before.[4] It has been said that we are facing a 'ticking demographic timebomb',[5] as more and more people enjoy the blessing of a long life coupled with the burden of declining function. Informal carers are vital in this context, as state resources are stretched and some older people resist help from those who do have a duty to intervene and are remunerated on that basis.

The particular question I asked in my research was whether the informal carer in our scenario should have a claim against the care recipient's estate when he dies. I concluded, maybe unsatisfactorily, that in some cases the answer is 'yes', particularly where the care recipient has indicated that the carer will receive something. To slip into legal terminology, it may be unconscionable for the care recipient to make such a promise and then fail to follow it through by including the carer in a valid and effective will, though of course there are other relevant considerations such as the needs of other people who might have a legitimate claim to the estate. For completeness, I should say that English Law does share my view to an extent, and it allows a carer to take a slice out of the estate in some circumstances.

When the Chaplain asked me to give this sermon with the title 'offering care', having somehow made his way through my recent book,[6] it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my work from a Christian perspective. I also reflected on what sort of Christian perspective I could possibly offer in any case, as a cradle Catholic who attends Latin Mass, is committed to pluralism, teaches Family Law and votes Liberal Democrat. But maybe that's another sermon for another day!

I therefore set about trying to work out whether my justification for private rewards or even compensation for long-suffering informal carers had any support in Christian theology. I decided to start with the good Samaritan,[7] even if at least one fellow Fellow thought this a rather too obvious place to start. The Samaritan, like our informal carer, had no obvious legal duty to intervene in order to help his eventual care recipient. He could simply have passed by on the other side, as those who could have been more readily expected to intervene did. The Samaritan not only intervened at great personal risk given the dangers of the road to Jericho and the animosity between Jews and Samaritans at the time, but he also ended up significantly out of pocket. We could again analogise with our modern-day informal carer in those respects. The actions of both the Samaritan and our carer could barely contrast more with Cain's killing Abel and then asking God the utterly contemptuous question whether he was his own brother's 'keeper' at all.[8]

In spite of those factual similarities between the story of the Samaritan and mine of the carer, however, the parable doesn't support my argument very much. The Samaritan does not seem to receive any worldly compensation for his efforts, even if the legal scholar Jeroen Kortmann has argued that he should have done.[9] Anyway, the parable is more about for whom we should care than whether we should provide care in the first place or in what sense we should be rewarded for doing so, and it's told in response to a lawyer who (typically, you might think) wants to know the limits of his liability. The 'offer to care', then, is something implicitly expected from followers of Christ. Jesus tells his audience that they should follow the Samaritan's example, and that if they do so they will 'live' or, to use the questioner's words, will 'inherit eternal life'. This message is reiterated in the parable of the sheep and the goats,[10] when Jesus seems to tell us – and I'm trying to sidestep theological controversies over faith and works here! – that if we perform a variety of caring tasks for the 'least of' human beings, we will gain 'eternal life'. But even if there is to be some reward for the carer in Jesus' teachings, it doesn't necessarily come in the form of hard cash or other property. In fact, if our carer arguably makes a song and dance about her caring by claiming against the care recipient's estate, there is a risk that she will have received her 'reward in full' on earth rather than being rewarded by God in heaven.[11] If there's a chance that those who follow Jesus and don't die as a result have some explaining to do, as mentioned by the Chaplain last week, then that could be even more true for those who are able to claim a reward for ostensibly loving and altruistic endeavours. Jesus admonished his contemporaries for focussing on earthly matters,[12] and perhaps I have fallen into this trap on the issue of rewards or compensation for carers.

I wonder, however, whether the concept of 'heavenly reward' might provide something of an illegitimate cop-out for the rest of us, and possibly even for the care recipient. If the carer is securing her place in the Kingdom of Heaven through her efforts, the argument might go, why should we worry if she does suffer disadvantages while performing God's work on earth? Indeed, by virtue of the controversial allegorical interpretation of the parable of the good Samaritan taken by scholars such as St Augustine, our informal carer tending to the needs of the care recipient could be identified with Jesus Himself tending to the needs of humanity.[13] But surely that is simply too easy, and if we saw suffering for God as a universal good we would never try to stop the persecution of Christians, for example. We would be failing in our own Christian duty.

Writing from a completely different perspective, the American feminist writer Martha Fineman claims that we in wider society are 'free-riders', appropriating the unpaid labour of the informal carer for our own ends, and that we all owe a social debt to such carers.[14] She also argues that society tends to ignore the fact that the choice to care, or the 'offer' of care in the language of today's sermon title, 'occurs within the constraints of social conditions, including history and tradition'. While it might seem surprising, I think there's a link between Fineman's concerns and the notion of 'heavenly reward'. If we see the offer and performance of informal care solely as something that is expected, a part of life, unseen, or a duty imposed by God, we risk continuing to allow the burdens of care to fall disproportionately on those kind enough to provide it, while the rest of us (rather like the Levite and the Priest, as it happens), pass by and get on with our lives.

If, however, we identify value inherent in the carer's help for the care recipient, then surely it follows logically that there is value in our helping the carer. It may be significant that, immediately before the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke's Gospel, Jesus sends out the seventy-two (or the seventy) and says that those who do His work deserve their pay, i.e. that they deserve the hospitality and support of the people whom they are helping through Him.[15] Coming back to Fineman, moreover, informal carers are helping all of us.

In the end, we might disagree about how best to address the difficulties faced by the informal carer, and even if I've convinced you that law and/or society should do something, it doesn't necessarily follow from a Christian point of view that we should allow a claim on the care recipient's estate by the carer. Fineman, for example, advocates extremely large-scale structural changes in society in order to improve the position of carers. You might think it is

simply too mercenary and inconsistent with the very nature of altruism to suggest that a carer should have a claim against the care recipient's estate, particularly since the care recipient is himself vulnerable. Perhaps I'm just thinking too much like a secular lawyer in doing so. But as a Care Bill passes through Parliament and attempts to shape the landscape of care for decades to come, informal carers and those for whom they care should never be far from our thoughts and prayers.

[1] House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, Valuing and Supporting Carers (2007–08, HC 485), [102].

[2] Department of Health, Carers at the Heart of 21st-Century Families and Communities: 'A Caring System on your Side. A Life of your Own' (2008), ch 5.

[3] Office for National Statistics, 'More than 1 in 10 Providing Unpaid Care as Numbers Rise to 5.8 Million' (2013).

[4] Office for National Statistics, 'Focus on Health' (2004), 10.

[5] Local Government Association, 'LGA Response¾"Which?" Investigation into Home Care' (16 March 2012) <www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/media-centre/-/journal_content/56/10171/3375393/NEWS-TEMPLATE>, quoting the chairman of the Local Government Association's Community Wellbeing Board, Councillor David Rogers.

[6] B Sloan, Informal Carers and Private Law (Oxford, 2013).

[7] Luke 10:25-37.

[8] Genesis 4:8-10.

[9] J Kortmann, Altruism and Private Law: Liability for Nonfeasance and Negotiorum Gestio (Oxford, 2005).

[10] Matthew 25:31-46.

[11] Matthew 6:1-4.

[12] See, e.g., Matthew 6:19-21.

[13] See, e.g., GB Caird, The Language and Imagery of the Bible (London, 1980), 165.

[14] MA Fineman, The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency (New York, 2004).

[15] Luke 10:1-24.

Will it blend?

Dr Simon Perry

Once upon a time, someone somewhere on the research and development team of a kitchen utensil company, must have wondered what it would be like, if you powered a food blender using a Saturn 5 rocket. Well, the result – it seems – is the appliance produced by Blendtec. In fact, the Red Brick café here is a proud owner of a Blendtec foodblender: which can be used to blend almost anything imaginable. It will transform a rock-hard grannie smith into baby food, turn ice into dust, and reduce a frozen mars bar into yoghurt. In fact, it is so powerful, its marketing department conducted a series of online experiments entitled, 'Will it blend?'

Candidates for blending have included a baseball, an iphone 5, and Justin Bieber. Now, if this were a Sunday School – I would want to look at the Blendtec equipage and say, 'that's a bit like Jesus'. Of course, it's a crude and stupid illustration – but it seems that one theme that has emerged throughout this series of sermons on the presence of God, have been that God considered out there, in the abstract – at a safe distance from who I really am, at arm's length from my spirit, is a pointless, irrelevant, tedious, predictable deity. And.. debates and questions about whether this kind of deity exists are as tedious and predictable and inclusive and pointless.

Because the god who emerges in readings and sermons of this term, is a God who is present: not present in some fluffy, eiderdown, please feel comforted and uplifted way – but a God whose presence spells discomfort, disruption and violence. We began the term looking at belief in resurrection, not as subscribing to a divine fairytale, but as radical exposure to that which is radically other. Ascension speaks of a God who, though no longer present in the person of Christ, is made present through the subversive action of the church in the world. Professor Hooker spoke about the Holy Spirit's presence in Pentecost as a mighty wind, in Hebrew, the ruach Adonai – a violent hurricane. Sister Ann from Fisher House spoke of the Trinity not as an abstract God up there, but as a divine unity that draws humanity into the dynamic relation between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Dr Brian Sloane spoke of the ambiguities surrounding the provision of care, drawing attention to the impossibility of making trite Christian claims about the practical care in action of the God of Scripture. And on several occasions, reference has been made to a point made by the Marxist literary critic, Terry Eagleton, who famously said, "If you follow Jesus and don't end up dead, it appears you have some explaining to do."

The presence of God, is not meant necessary to be the unquestioning support of an omnipotent do-gooder, nor the unconditional positive regard of a divine counsellor. In the Jesus of Scripture, we encounter a figure who does not offer us peace but invites us to inhabit a world of violence – I did not come to bring peace, he says, but a sword.

Equally, in the writings of Paul and his claims about the law – for Paul it is easy to treat the Jewish Law (and today, we might say the Christian Scripture) as something outside me, something at a safe distance from who I am, something outside me by which I can measure myself, some external principle or ideal or value. But when Paul talks of the Spirit as against the law, he talks about a divine presence that reaches inside who you really are in all your humanity, and uses language of labour, and groaning, and convulsions, and struggle and resistance – because only then, only on the far side of this violence, does the kind of peace offered by this god have any genuine meaning.

Historically, this is supposed to be what education is. Not a set of information about the world that we struggle to process so that we can go back into the world after three years of training, able to understand everything better and thus lead an efficient and productive life. The point of education, is liberation – the ability to abandon long-cherished views if we encounter something new, the readiness to allow one worldview to displace another, the capacity to engage openly with that which is radically other.

And this, at root, is the message of Easter around which this term has been phrased. The Byrd anthem today was concerned with the real presence of Jesus – the theme we have followed this term. That is, we celebrate the presence of Jesus with a radical, bodily, physical remembrance of a monumentally violent act. Not to say that if you follow this Jesus, it is violence, doom and gloom all the way to eternity. The point of celebrating the body and blood of Christ – is not to venerate it as an eternal truth, or take it as a sacred snack – but with our eyes wide open, to consider the body and blood of Christ and ask, Will it blend?

Will this set of doctrines or truths or myths or stories or whatever we want to call Christian belief – will it become part of who I really am? Will I allow it to challenge my ideologies and convictions? Will it make a difference to what the world really is?

"Failure"

A Graduation Day Address

Dr Kevin Chalut

29th June, 2013

First, congratulations to all of the graduands for your great achievement. Let me introduce myself by saying that I am a stem cell physicist, which is a contradiction of terms and an affront to common sense, but this tension makes me eminently qualified to talk to you on days's theme, which is failure. Seems ironic to discuss this on a day when you're celebrating a great success, but let me explain.

One of the great things about coming to Cambridge as a young scientist was that I got to start interacting with some of the great scientists of the world. I've gotten to know many of these people, often over pints like the old stories. One of the things that has fascinated me has been the disconnect between what I assumed, when I was young, would make someone great, which is prodigious talent, and the reality that most of these great scientists were not, in fact, wunderkinds. Really, I haven't met one who was a prodigy (small sample size alert), and in fact there have been a number of investigations into the following mystery – why do child prodigies have approximately the same success/failure rate as non-prodigies? You have read the weekly stories in the Daily Mail of the 12 year old who has made a 13-dimensional fractal pretzel and bronzed it with a homemade X-ray gun – pre-ordained to become the next Einstein. But I'm sure I don't have to tell you that the Daily Mail never does longitudinal studies, we don't know what happened to that kid.

Well, anyway, I'm not here to pick on the Daily Mail or child prodigies; the realisation I've come to over these shared pints is the same one you can read in Chicken Soup of the Soul or any self-help book is that prodigious talent rarely has much to do with success. I will digress here to give a little nod to all the other speeches you've heard in your life about how putting your shoulder into it – hard work and determination – determines success. You all know this, you worked hard to get here so I won't bother with that; let's set it aside as a given. Working hard is essential to success.

What I really wanted to talk about was summed up nicely by Samuel Smiles, the 19th century Scottish author, who once said ""We often discover what will do, by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery." That right there is what all those great scientists have learned – it is what unites them and far transcends the impact of their innate talent, their tragicomic acceptance of the value of falling flat on their faces. I have never heard, nor will I ever hear, of a scientist walking up to a problem for the first time, pondering it like they do in CSI:Miami by looking at it from 5 different frames of reference, formulating a hypothesis, testing it and finding that – by God – they had the right of it.

No. Let me tell you what really happens: they make that guess – we'll call it a hypothesis to sound more apposite – because the research councils tell them they have to start with that, dust off their equipment, which fails inevitably for the first 5-100 experiments then find they were fantastically wrong about their hypothesis in the first place. If I could have this pulpit for an hour I could tell you some real stories. Now, this is a dirty secret of scientists and it makes the whole endeavour sound hopeless. But here's the thing in this mess: out of this process quantum mechanics was discovered, transistors were made, billions of pounds created, not out of scientists starting from scratch, but taking that original failed hypothesis, and duct taping it to the next failed hypothesis, attaching it with chicken wire to the next one, with bubble gum and a laser found in the dustbin to the next and the next and the next, and somewhere along the way seeing something weird, which inevitably looks suspiciously like yet another abject failure. Voila, quantum mechanics. That output is noticed by other scientists and generates the next failed hypothesis, wash, rinse, spin and there's the transistor.

But hear what I'm saying: this isn't unique to science. We are not defined by our success but by our failure. You've heard of Thomas Edison and his 3000 apocryphal tries at making a light bulb, Abraham Lincoln losing elections left and right, having his carriage break down and riding a donkey to his inauguration and uniting a nation, Stephen King running over his 100-times rejected notes for Carrie in a really moody car until it was salvaged by a telekinetic girl who sold it to a now-defunct magazine, Col. Harlan Sanders finally realizing after failing in business 50 times that people might prefer Kentucky Fried Chicken instead of Kentucky Fried Horse. And of course you probably wouldn't have an iPhone if Steve Jobs hadn't been fired from Apple 1985. You all have the internet: you know these stories. Try hard, and when you fail – and fail you will – let yourself mope for a night, get up the next morning, take the failure on board and build your successful life.

Sorry for all the half-true stories about failure a minute ago. Let me make iy up to you by telling you a true story. It's my favourite success story of all time, though at the time it looked to many like a waste of talent and an objective failure. The story is about the most important scientist of all time. Now, you've all heard this debate before, the greatest scientist conversation inevitably converges on the usual suspects, Einstein, Newton, Maxwell, maybe Pauling. But there's one name that's never mentioned, who most scientists I know think of as the man who changed the course of science more than any others, with leaps that could not possibly have been predicted. That scientist is Ludwig Boltzmann, the eminent Austrian physicist.

Boltzmann was a practicing physicist at a time when almost no one in physics believed in atoms, you know the particles we know now make up matter. The prevailing and brutally defended conventional wisdom in the middle of the 19th century was that matter was continuous. But Boltzmann believed that atoms comprised matter, and that, especially given that it was a highly unpopular and actually ridiculed idea, would have been enough to get him into the history books. A great achievement. But he went further; he went in front of hostile crowds and said that not only was matter made up of these atoms, but that you could take those atoms and make pretty much exact predictions about the matter they were comprising, not by knowing anything about the individual behavior of these atoms, but by their bulk statistical behavior, or what they were statistically likely to do. Imagine if I came to you and said that if I rolled dice enough times I could predict the dynamics of the stock market – that is how he must have sounded. Except he was talking to an audience that didn't believe dice existed. But he was right, and all 20th century science flowed directly out of his courageous decision to stand in the face of much ridicule and rejection and say these things.

The reason I tell you that story is to illustrate that all this has as much to do with courage of your convictions as it does embracing failure, but I believe that ultimately these things are one and the same. In other words, things that look like a hard-earned failure have a funny way of mixing with history and changing the world. So here comes the selfish reason I've been telling you all this. It is essential to embrace failure and risk, but our society is becoming increasingly squeamish about it. Our committee-addled world is constantly urging us towards the mean. I can tell you about research councils, and probably others out here can tell you about projects killed off or venture capitalists pulling out on promising small businesses. It's an obsession with immediate gratification when the long view is always a more appropriate way to evaluate success.

But the current reality doesn't change the fact that embracing failure is the right way to do it, and it's always been that way: it is an essential aspect of being human. It's important on two levels. One obvious way is that we don't have the capability of imagining the really big ideas without significant previous input. But the second more subtle reason it's essential is because the person embracing the risk, the smart talented person who is failing despite working hard, will take on board the lessons of the failure and be an order of magnitude more likely to succeed in the next project. This is true of relationships as well as projects – it's true of everything in life. We are simply not a

creature that makes progress through success – we make it through failure. And, selfishly, I hope the next leaders of the world understand that better than the current ones.

So, again congratulations on your success. I will end by expressing my sincere hope that you all leave here today and go boldly out into the world, and fail spectacularly.