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5 Epiphany Year B Feb 5, 2006 Psalm 142:7

Bring me out of prison that I may give thanks to your name;

When you have dealt bountifully with me,

The righteous will gather around me.

It was one of those bright blue sky, sunny days at the seashore. Walking on the beach the man observed what one would expect to see. Pebbles, polished by the surf, broken seashells, the remains of the gulls feast, seaweed, driftwood dotting the low hills of sand. Then suddenly a glint of metal in the sunlight. The man hurried forward, dug about with the toe of his boot and soon there lay in his hand a pocket watch. He opened the cover to the watch and observed the sweep of the minute hand round the dial with satisfaction. He opened the door on the back of the watch and his gaze was met by an array of tiny gears, springs, levers, and cogs, intricately wrought and fitting together with exactitude such that the watch was clearly a quality product. What a wondrously designed machine, he thought. One such man, his mind being naturally of a theological bent, posited such a scene and let his mind take flight to the wondrously intricate and delicately balanced universe that swirled about him. He remembered the words of Thomas Aquinas, 500 years earlier, arguing that a cause always produces an effect and we could, by observation of the cosmos, know that the cause of it had to be God.

Now Archdeacon William Paley, a Venerable of the Church of England, would write his argument for the existence of God, positing a grand designer as evidenced by the intricacy of the design. Paley's work came near the end of his life in 1805. We are still debating this thesis it seems. There exists in the physical world structures of such intricacy, of such complexity, of such purposefulness, the human eye for instance, that the design of these structures are themselves proof of the existence of a designer. They cannot be the result of random chance mutations of genetic accident. So goes the present day argument of Intelligent Design and now groups of well meaning people want this taught in public school science classes as an alternative to Darwinian theories about evolution of the species. Darwin's work threatens the existence of God apparently for its opponents. Despite the famous Scopes Monkey Trial of the 1920s this issue still clogs our courts. The ruling by District Judge John Jones in

Delaware to the effect that intelligent design is not a fit theory to be taught in science classes is under appeal. Similar cases in other jurisdictions await the higher court's ruling. Politicians are lining up to be counted on one side or the other. Church leaders thunder from their pulpits about the evils of natural selection. The latest chapter of religion vs. science is being written in our moment.

People are talking about this issue. It has surfaced in the confirmation hearings of our two newest Supreme Court Justices. Appeals to Scripture and Tradition are heard as the battle lines are drawn, extensions of the abortion debate. Name calling is well underway. Godless science vs. the Christian Church - as some seek to define the church - that is the parameter of this national debate.

Next Sunday, Feb 12, is the 196th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth hence my thoughts about Darwin's theories of evolving life and the opposite position "Creationism" not very cleverly masquerading today under the banner of Intelligent Design. The underlying issue of course is the supposed opposition between science and religion. But is this a real opposition or a convenient smokescreen from those who have their own reasons for dividing the religious world and creating fanaticism among their followers?

Can we think about this premise for a moment - scientific inquiry seeks to answer How the physical world came about. Science measures, hypothesizes, tests and concludes always seeking to answer How something developed. Theological inquiry, religious inquiry, **faith**, seeks answers to a very different set of questions. Religion tries to answer the question Why something exists as it does and Who brought it about, if anything.

We want, in our school systems and in our culture to turn out good scientists and good people of faith. These are not mutually exclusive - they work together, Science and Religion. Two different kinds of knowledge are being sought. Two very different sets of questions are being asked. Two very compatible results are being obtained. Creationists are threatened by the emergence of evidence that seems to contradict the stories of the beginnings of life, as found in our Scriptures. Science says life in its many forms is explained by principles of survival of the most appropriate life forms and extinction of the inappropriate and that seems to write God out of the equation. But does it? Is it not quite appropriate to say God created this universe and used time and genetic evolution as a tool of creation? One does not negate the other. One statement says How the universe exists in its present form - the other approaches the topic, Why does creation exist and by Whom was creation accomplished .

I think we should be on guard against making our religion into science, nor should we so invest ourselves in science that we make a religion of that discipline. The creation stories of Genesis make for excellent theology. They are not very good science in the 21st c. We no longer continue to argue that the

sun revolves about the earth, as the church insisted in the 14th c. Science finally prevailed in that one. There are holes in Darwinian natural selection theories but I suspect the evidence in favor of some form of evolution will carry the argument also. It already does in my mind. But what the future will make of this we cannot say.

The fact however that we find ourselves still in a national debate begun two centuries ago, points to why I want us to study Bible in this parish and to understand the nature of our Scripture, lest we paint ourselves into a corner in our well meaning zeal to defend God. God is quite capable of defending God. God would be quite happy if we stopped killing each other or anathematizing each other in God's name. Science and religion can exist side by side each seeking each its own sphere of knowledge and not trying to invade the other. The Bible is not a science book or even an especially accurate history book. It is rather the book of a people who discovered God and became the people of that God and who thus make meaning out of life in relationship to God. I know some very fine Christian people who are scientists. And some very fine people of faith stand in awe of a God who can so wondrously create using tools as inexact as time and evolution.

We are exploring this very question in deeper detail at our Sunday morning sessions between services. Join us - push at the boundaries of what you think you know. And happy birthday, Charles Darwin - thanks for your life's work - it helps me make meaning out of my life. Someday the Church may celebrate Evolution Sunday.

As the psalm verse at the heart of this sermon says today: Bring me out of the prison (of my halting search for truth) that I may give thanks to you, God. Deal bountifully with me making me into a person of tolerance and acceptance of another's truth - and thus let me find myself surrounded by the righteous, those who are fit for the purposes for which you created us. Amen