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Jer. 2.4-13; Heb.13.1-8,15-16; Luke 14.1,7-14

When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your brothers ...friends, etc. ; if you do, you may be repaid. When you give a banquet, invite the lame, the poor and the blind” I’m afraid you have Charles Darwin to thank (or blame!) for my reflections this morning, and I rather wish he could give me feedback!

Ever since I read Origin of Species last year I’ve been conscious of a seismic and a paradigm shift in my perceptions, both of my humanity and my journey of faith - all is still evolving (and I use that word advisedly!) but if as I hope and suspect I am not alone, and certainly not original in my thinking, I wondered if it might be useful to apply some of these reflections to our understanding of those words from the beginning of the Gospel. With those words “When you give a dinner party, don’tJesus is setting out our natural behaviour, our behaviour according to nature; then holding out a possibility and an imperative which reflects a new expression of our humanity according to His understanding of God and the potential He sees in us.

Over the years I have often experienced discomfort when I hear or

read passages and recommendations like this; discomfort which I sensed was not simply the feeling “that’s too hard for me”. When I read Darwin the penny dropped as to why. What reading Origin of Species fundamentally did for me was to show me how things are, and how they came to be this way, confirming many of my almost conscious observations . A very simple example from the natural world, when I see my lavatera in the garden bought for its white petals and pink centre, reverting to its original colour, I see the influence of human activity in artificial selection and the power of nature, combined. I realised, as I read and subsequently, that the revelation of the actual process by which humans came to be accords with our actual experience - every time we adapt or change our behaviour in whatever sphere, artistic, biological, cultural, architectural, etc etc, we partake in evolution. In relation to the world around us and within our inner life, whose origins are of God, we observe that we are the top of the tree (so far) through consciousness and we are constantly developing and moving on ... whether we are maturing is another question. Change and decay in all around I see, part of allowing things to die that new life may emerge! I feel and think, that the invitation to me has been to hold together and inhabit this experience of being a human through Darwin’s eyes, the truth and infinite complexity of it, and belief in God as firmly part of the equation.

Less comfortably, but wanting to stay with the Truth, wherever it might lead, I found I was perceiving the whole Christian\theological framework, to which I was introduced at 7 years old, already conscious at some level, as much less familiar and natural, more partially than I had hitherto experienced it. I was reminded of icons of Mary whose garment next to her skin and intended to be identified with it, is blue, her original humanity, overlaid with a red robe, the divinity put on through her relationship with and to, God.

I realised I had been living as if the red robe was the one next to my skin and then wondering why commands like the one with which we began felt so impossible to carry out. Darwin shows me that I was not born primarily a little theological person but a human one, within an infinitely wider and deeper context than the solely theological, but that, thanks to my parents, I took on the red robe later through my baptism, added to my original humanity. I felt on reflection that this might explain my own dis ease and the disease I often observe in us Christians and those who have eschewed the Church, or never joined up - that at times we are not at ease with our own humanity. The patterns and behaviour with which it endows us can be undermined through Christian membership, language and expectations which have led us to feel we 'should' experience those as easier or more 'natural' than we actually do, nearer to our own skin than they yet are, and then we wonder why.....for example, I

feel I should have invited the smelly old man with his dog who lives round the corner for Christmas dinner, "if I were really Christian - that should be my natural behaviour" and then I feel guilty because of how difficult that would be - because I am first a human being with friends, a network of relationships of which I am humanly part, developed through time based on the anthropological and social patterns which I now see and believe God has woven into the evolutionary pattern.

Where do we each feel we truthfully stand? On theological grounds looking sideways and even embarrassedly at our human nature, knowing if we're honest that is what we inhabit, but ambivalent about it because of how we have imbibed faith; or firmly within our original human context, then asking what are the Christian and theological implications of that position from which we set out. I don't think God intended us to feel guilty about how we actually are according to our origins - would the Church not be infinitely more attractive to the 'world' if her members were perceived to embrace their humanity, their nature, their sexuality within it and then ask what God has to do with all that? Isn't one of Desmond Tutu's great attractions to all people precisely his ease with himself and his humanity and God's relationship to that. As Western Protestants we may still live out a false dichotomy between the two thanks to theology of people like Augustine and Calvin in relation to nature

and sin - have we never come into Church on occasion wondering how much of our humanity will actually be acceptable here because of the standards we have imbibed from previous teaching? Does God want that?

I give thanks that there are recent influences both within and without the Church which reflect an evolving theology of God which are beginning to redress the balance, for example creation theology, "and behold it was very good" and our more recent emphasis and intuitive search for the actual humanity of Jesus and its implications or humanity; but if we still feel even spasmodically guilty about the natural ties and relationships which mean we extend and respond to dinner invitations, when contemplating a Gospel command like this morning's, then we know we still have some way to go.

What is there to help us with all this? A sometimes neglected strand of New Testament theology is that it was precisely the Apostles' experience of Jesus' humanity lived fully in relationship to God which in itself constituted his divinity - meaning by that, that it was their perception of his way of living in the world which led them to see his closeness to God as a common identity, expressed as sonship, the closest relation you could experience as human and then be impelled to set down the written witness to this discovery. Is this facet of faith helpful in asking what is True Blue humanity

according to God, (remembering Mary's blue garment)? Can we mature or evolve! both in thinking of our place in the world according to Darwin's genius and insights, (which need then to be complemented by Jesus embracing of the human journey) and from an acceptance (not to say rejoicing) in this, to ask, within the Christian community how that might affect the way we understand our behaviour, in this instance, human relationship patterns, and the way we read and apply the Gospel to those preceding patterns. What difference would it make both to commitment to our relationship with God, and so the way we perceive Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, if we saw ourselves more truly within the world than our Church has led us to see (for all sorts of historical reasons)? And what are the implications of the fact that Jesus was clearly as at home with the tax collectors and sinners as he was early in the morning with God? Is there a clue here?

I have shared with you some of the questions which have arisen on my journey; we all listen through the prism of our own uniqueness and as part of the human family; you may have trodden this path long before me, but if any of you register or have registered that similar dis-ease which can be a response to Gospel words like this morning's, then perhaps original, unconscious anthropology, succeeded by conscious theology, may be another way of looking at what God requires in the company of Jesus. It might help us

redefine and extend our comfort zone from friends to so called outsiders as He did. Have we remembered that animals exclude from their fellowship those who are weak and disabled? If we do, we may experience our connections to them more deeply, might we then deepen our encounter with the words and requirements of God and see more clearly our need for the resources and the company of Jesus to behave with as much naturalness towards everyone as He clearly did? I truly believe that since He is the Truth, and the Origin of all things, He wants, requires us, to face natural truth wherever we find it, but unlike the Dawkins' of this world, with His company, letting our behaviour change as Jesus asks of us and more importantly shows us, that in relationship with Him before God, is possible.

Lord, as we come to receive the gift of yourself in the natural elements of bread and wine, help us to see where we really stand in the world, your world, to rejoice in that, to plumb the depths of our humanity as you did, and so to see what you ask of us in our relationships with each other and with you. **Amen**