

January 4, 2015 Christmas II

Christmas shopping is over for another year. Part of the work of shopping is deciding the appropriateness of the gift for the intended recipient. For example you would never buy a new car for a seven year old child even if you could afford it. It might be different ten years in the future but now they just aren't ready. It would be premature.

Galatians 4 says "so too with us as long as we were still under age enslaved to the elemental principals of the world. But when the completion of the time came God sent forth his son born of a woman born subject to the law "other translations read "when the fullness of time had come" The phraseology and the idea intrigue me. It seems to imply that there was a time when it would have been inappropriate, premature for God to send his son into the world, like giving a 7 year old a new car. When did it become appropriate? When did the premature become feasible? How did that happen ?

My knowledge of Greek is meager but I do know that they have at least two words for time, cronos, units of time that follow each other in predictable order, seconds, minutes, days, etc. We use this method to arrange our lives. If the calendar says Sunday and the big hand of the clock is on 12 and the little hand is on 8 we know that a service is starting at Grace Church. Cronos is a human invention. The other word for time is kyros. It is less precise than cronos. It's emphasis is upon the completion of a process more than the passage of cronos units. I learned from Catherine that the baking of a cake is a fairly complex chemical process for which a series of equations may be written. The reaction takes place when you mix certain substances together in specific proportions and subject them to sufficient heat. If you do that, a cake will result. A cake will not result unless the proportions are right and the heat is insufficient no matter how much chronological time passes. Kyros focus upon the completion of fairly complex processes. The sprouting of a seed, the blooming of a flower, the development in utero and birth of a baby are all examples of kyros time.

God lives in kyros time. That is why a day and 1000 years are equal to him. He completes a series of developmental steps that lead to the completion of a desired process. That is why I believe that evolution is God's method of creation. Science tells us, at least, it tells me, that evolution is God's method of creation. (He's baking a cake.) Life on earth took millions of years to establish and develop, first at the bottom of the ocean, then on land with the ascendance and extinction of the dinosaurs, the emergence of mammals, then one of kind of mammal in particular one that walks upright, has opposable thumbs and fingers, a larynx, tongue, lips capable of speech and most of all a very high quality brain that would become capable of formulating questions no other creature could even imagine: who made all this? Where did it all come from? who makes everything happen? How do I get into contact with it, get it to help me? Avoid making it angry? What happens to me when I die ? The result of all these questions was some very bizarre fantasies

and practices we call idol worship; some being as irrelevant as worship of trees, some as brutal as human sacrifice.

All this and more had become wide spread enough and frequent enough that God could see that we were now ready. It was now appropriate for God to send forth his son. He would live among us and demonstrate to us the true nature of divinity and what is required of us if we are to have a harmonious relationship with the divine. It all came together about the time Augustus was Emperor in Rome and Quirineus was Governor of Syria. I imagine God as a hopeful parent looking at a young child and thinking of the time when they would someday do things together as friends and peers. But it would require a lot of training and communication.

In the 19th century archeologists found a large rock with ancient writing on it that they already knew how to decipher. But along side it in column was Egyptian hieroglyphics that couldn't yet be read. Now seeing the two languages together a light dawned. They found themselves able to figure out hieroglyphics as well. That rock was called "the Rosetta Stone." That term has come to symbolize a bridge in learning that helps us cross from the known to the unknown.

I see Jesus as the spiritual Rosetta Stone that God sent to us when we were ready to receive it, when the fullness of time had come, when a certain point in his creative process had been reached a time when we would learn to ask a question that neither lions nor humming birds nor any other creature in creation is capable of formulating: that question is "what effect will my actions have upon others?" It is the basis for all moral decisions and the second part of that question is this "would I want those consequences visited upon myself or those I love?" That question sounds very simple but the answer is not always easy to discern or to live by. But I believe that is the question that God wants us always to ask in our activities. It is the key to understanding what he wants of us. And it comes from the most valuable gift ever given to the human race the spiritual Rosetta Stone God gave us on that first Christmas.

Valuable as it may be, a Rosetta Stone is still just a stone. Jesus was a human being whose example we can see and follow. The "elementary principles of this world" mentioned in Galatians from which he came to deliver us is an ethic whose highest values are a combination of survival, immediate gratification and self-interest. All of the other creatures in the world live according to this ethic. The most intelligent mammals including bears and cats actively and consciously teach it to their offspring. That is why we call them predators. They take advantage of the weakness and vulnerability of others for their own advantage, even to the point of devouring them. God created us to live in his own image not as predators but as incarnate life giving spirits using our strengths, abilities and blessings to mitigate the weaknesses and vulnerability of others, to be workers together with him God's creative process is eternal and unending. We are still a work in progress. But Jesus has revealed the direction in which that progress is moving. As our communion liturgy last Sunday said: "you formed us in your image giving the whole world into

our care, so that in obedience to you, our creator, we might rule and serve all your creatures.”

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