

## All Saints Talk for Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024

'Cross-cultural mission'. Emma King

### **Acts 17:16-35**

I've just come back from a wonderful holiday. 10 whole days away and it was wonderful.

I don't normally share my holiday photos, but I wanted to share a few with you today.

- The powerfulness of the water – Waterfalls and lakes and rivers
- The vastness of the mountains – Rocky, the Most Beautiful
- The changing of the weather – Climbing Snowdon – weather changing so suddenly shows the powerful nature of God
- Even with the changes... the world still stands
- And we sit in wonder - We wonder how all of this survives and where we fit
- The beauty of the woodland is incredible – So green and rich with life
- And we can only stand and look out in awe at the world God created for us....

You can imagine how wonderful it was to be in North Wales. I always say I feel closest to God in the mountains, and these pictures, I hope, can show you why I might feel like that.

During the final days of my holiday, as a family we sat down to watch Professor Brian Cox's Solar System – A documentary on BBC.

I will admit, I'm not a huge fan of his. But I took one for the team and watched it anyway.

As I was watching it on the last night of my break away, I found myself feeling more and more uptight.

And there are a few reasons for this. But the main one is, that because these documentaries are done in a cool way. Amazing imagery, quirky smart physicist and presenter. People hang on to his every word. They believe everything he says.

Now I'm no scientist. I don't pretend to be nearly half as clever as Brian Cox. He's a smart man.

But by putting these programmes on, speaking Brian Cox's interpretation of THEIR truth makes it all sound as if it's the ONLY truth. And we all know that there is only one truth.

Jesus is THE truth.

And that bothers me. It bothers me that we see the imagery that is made out to be real, that this is actually what these planets look like, but in fact, uses CGI to create visual effects that depict alien worlds.

So, I have spent the last few days pondering on our passage today and how this links with Brian Cox's documentary. It's been almost like a theological reflection for me!

In our reading, Paul addresses the people of Athens, who are devoted to worshipping multiple gods, even building an altar to an "Unknown God."

Paul uses this "unknown" as a gateway to speak about the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the God who made everything and gave life to all.

A God who made those beautiful images I've shown you from Wales.

He tells the Athenians that God is “not far from any one of us” and that “in Him we live and move and have our being” (27-28).

Paul's message reveals that, despite humanity's vastness in creation, God desires a personal connection with us.

Professor Brian Cox's exploration of the solar system often centres on the scale of the cosmos, presenting the solar system and the universe as places of mystery, beauty, and complexity.

His documentaries explore the vastness of space, the conditions necessary for life, and the origins of the universe. **His perspective** can awaken in viewers a deep sense of wonder, much like the Athenians' wonder at the “Unknown God.”

His work draws attention to the magnificence of the universe, stirring a desire to understand what lies beyond and our place within it.

What I've discovered is Brian Cox's exploration of the cosmos and Paul's message in our reading touch on human's longing for answers and the search for meaning.

We are all searching.

- While Brian Cox approaches this from a scientific viewpoint, looking at the natural world.
- Paul offers a theological answer, pointing to the Creator behind all things.
- In both instances, the universe becomes a source of inspiration to look beyond the immediate, asking bigger questions about existence and meaning.

In Paul's message to the Athenians, he calls people to "repent" and turn to the living God who made everything, a God who seeks to have a relationship with us.

Baptism, as we've just seen in Chris and Ginge, is an outward response to this inward turn toward God.

It symbolizes dying from an old life of separation from God and rising into a new life of connection with Him.

Baptism is also an acknowledgement of God's nearness, a response to the realization that He is indeed "not far from each one of us." We have heard from Both Ginge and Chris about their experiences of now knowing God and what that means for them.

If we think about this considering Brian Cox's exploration of the solar system, baptism represents a conscious choice to connect with the Creator of the very cosmos Brian Cox describes.

The solar system, with its order, beauty, and vastness, just like the mountains in North Wales, can make us feel small, yet baptism signifies that the Creator God who made all of this, desires a personal relationship with each of us.

Through baptism, we can celebrate this intimate connection with God, symbolizing the new life we have received through Jesus Christ—the one who reveals the Creator in human form and draws us close to him.

The water of baptism holds a symbolic meaning that links beautifully with the theme of creation and the cosmos.

Water is a fundamental element not only on Earth but across the universe.

In this documentary, water is seen as a life-giving and sustaining element, present in different forms across the cosmos, whether as ice on distant moons or liquid beneath icy crusts.

In baptism, water represents spiritual cleansing, it represents rebirth.

Just as water is essential for our physical life, baptismal water symbolizes the essential nature of spiritual life—a life found in God.

The presence of water in the cosmos, in some ways I think, echoes the life-giving power of God, who "gives life and breath to all things" (25).

This symbolism can remind us that the God who created the vast cosmos is the same God who reaches out to us personally, inviting us into a new beginning through baptism.

Now I didn't think I would say this, but both Paul's message and Brian's exploration of the universe invite us to reflect on the relationship between the vastness of creation and personal faith.

In the huge, overwhelming scale of the universe, it might seem easy to feel insignificant.

But through Paul's message and the act of baptism show that each person is valued and known by the Creator of the universe.

- For us, baptism represents a powerful declaration of faith that says, "Despite the vastness of the cosmos, God knows me, loves me, and calls me His own."
- He speaks to us as we need to hear it.

- Through Brian Cox's work, the people who watch encounter the sheer scale of the cosmos and the intricate precision with which everything is ordered.
- But for believers, this precision and beauty can only point back to one thing!
- a purposeful Creator!

Paul's words in Acts 17 serve as a reminder that the God who made galaxies and stars also knows each person by name.

Baptism celebrates this profound truth by affirming that God's vast power is matched by His personal love, and in the act of baptism, we are absolutely assured that we belong to Him!

- In our reading today, Paul's words inspire a search for God, who, though not physically seen, is "not far from each one of us."
- Brian Cox's exploration of the cosmos evokes awe at the universe, stirring similar questions about the origins and purpose of all things.
- Together, these perspectives invite us to ponder our place within this grand design and the reality of a Creator.
- Baptism offers a response to this wonder. It's a declaration of belief in the God who designed the solar system and the stars yet is intimately near to us.

Through baptism, we affirm that we have found our meaning in God and have accepted His invitation into a relationship that spans both the vastness of the cosmos and the nearness of a Saviour.

So while I started the second half of this week rather grumpy about Brian Cox, I finished still believing that we, like the people in Athens, need to

remember that it is Jesus who we worship and listen to through the scripture

And while there is a place to explore and know about our world, and maybe even the cosmos, I am still convinced we should not be listening to people with their AI imagery and powerful music.

But through this powerful act that we have witnessed today, it reminds us that the God of the universe desires to know us, that we are loved, and that our lives find ultimate purpose in Him and my prayer today is that Chris and Ginge always remember this.

And I pray we always remember Jesus is THE TRUTH,

Amen.