

# Word and Light

St John's Anglican Parish, Ōtūmoetai



Trial and Error  
February 2023

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## *Theme for Word and Light*

The theme for the next edition will be **Easter and Chocolate**. Articles on other topics you think may be of interest are also welcome. As ever, please use your imagination – there are many possibilities. We look forward to your contributions. Photos will be very welcome!

Please send your contributions to Lynda, the Parish Administrator, by **11 April**. Remember that, to keep readers' attention, your articles should not be too long (*up to 700 words*). If you have ideas for future themes, please let us know. *The Editor has the final say as to the suitability of articles for inclusion.*

## ***Priest's Ponderings***

### ***Gideon and Thomas - Biblical Scientists???***

When I was a young Christian in strongly evangelical circles people would talk about “putting a fleece before the Lord” as an act of faith, encouraging us to follow Gideon’s example. Looking at the story of Gideon now, I do find myself wondering if they read to the end of Gideon’s story or just the brief excerpt about the fleece (Judges 7:36-40). The story of Gideon is one of a series of “hero stories” in Judges, but this is one very reluctant, doubtful, and flawed hero who eventually turns bad.

In science, one forms a hypothesis and then tests it to see if it is valid or not. One could see the fleece story in that light. Gideon formed a hypothesis that God was faithful and powerful and designed a test to see if that hypothesis was correct. He puts out the fleece and as requested only the fleece was wet. The next morning, he gets up and the test has confirmed his hypothesis – God is present, powerful and faithful. Any scientist after the



age of enlightenment knows that results must be able to be replicated and corroborated, after all, it could just be coincidence. Gideon designs a validating test, inverting the conditions and lo and behold this test confirms his original hypothesis, possibly adding to his understanding of God as patient and merciful. (God not having struck him with lightning for testing God again!). This gives Gideon just enough courage to go ahead and do what God had called him to do that day. But the next time God asks Gideon to do something Gideon is back to wanting signs again. Eventually Gideon becomes a violent despot, quite a wrong ‘un and, if I was a Brit, perhaps I would call him a “right tosser.”

In the New Testament the disciple Thomas formed a hypothesis. His was that the best way to be convinced, to believe that Jesus had risen was to touch his actual wounds. Jesus’ response to that was to appear and give Thomas the opportunity to do just that. Thomas learned that his hypothesis was wrong, that Jesus’ very presence was enough to

provoke faith in Thomas. He learned also that others would be able to believe without even Jesus' physical presence and be blessed in their faith.

There is an intriguing interaction between science and faith. Was Gideon the first scientist in the Bible? Perhaps. But the rest of his life indicated that he was by no means a man of integrity and faith. Thomas, who wears the unfortunate moniker "Doubting Thomas", became a man of great faith as he proclaimed, "My Lord and my God". It was the rest of his character that determined what he did with the evidence with which he was presented.



Both doubt and faith are a part of the trial and error that is both science and real life. Trial and error, doubt and faith all lead to learning on our life's journey.

## *Sue (Priest-in-Charge)*

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### ***Endeavours and Fiascos***

*by Bob Shaw*

On my return home in the autumn of 1985 from an assignment in Somalia, I was greeted in our partnership office of AGBA. AG. with the news that the local Swiss Caritas office were asking us to provide an agricultural seed specialist for work in Ethiopia. Since I was the only partner who had experience in seed selection and multiplication I was sent along to the Caritas office in Luzern. Here I learned that several million dollars had been assigned by the international office, to assist in the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector in Ethiopia, following a drought induced famine in 1980/85. Millions of peasants in the northern provinces were still in need of regular food aid. It appeared that they had exhausted their reserves of cereal and other seeds, in successive failed plantings, as the drought took its hold. They had also lost their oxen and cultivating tools as they fled to refugee camps.

I was given an assignment to go to Ethiopia to work with the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat in Addis Ababa, to find large quantities of seed and organize transport and distribution in the northern affected provinces of Eritrea, Tigrey. On arrival I was introduced to the Cardinal and the Secretary General, both of whom came from Tigrey. A former diplomat Ata Abate Gebachau was assigned to assist me, whom I came to value and trust. A further trusted ally I found in the person of Sister Astrid, a nun from Appenzel, who was in total command of all the funds sent by Caritas International.

Then began three years of the most interesting and rewarding work I had ever experienced. Ato Abate and I travelled widely in the north to assess and quantify need, and in the south to locate, and purchase large quantities of mainly cereal seed. Then came the problems of transport and distribution. With the ongoing civil war between the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Army, the Tigey Peoples Liberation Front and the Ethiopian Communist Led government army, it was necessary to use our Pilatus Porter aircraft jointly owned by ECS and MSF to reach remote areas and to hire Hercules aircraft to ferry seed from the capital Addis Ababa to Asmara in Eritrea. Nothing could have been achieved without the enthusiastic

support of the priests and missionaries of the Ethiopian Catholic Church. Eventually, with the fields green with growing crops, we congratulated ourselves that the small ECS team had delivered more



tons of seeds than any other organization involved, including the ICRC, CRS, LWF and the government managed committee backed with funds from Band Aid.

It was time to sit back and assess the impact of what we had done. The first negative report highlighted the sad fact that the seeds we had bought and so costly distributed were not growing well, and were unlikely to produce a significant harvest if any at all. The worst examples were the seeds of the bred varieties purchased from the state farms in the rift valley region to the south. If the harvested grain from these crops were to be used widely as seed in the future, the

result would bring long term harm to the peasant farmers. All the work we had done and all the money we had used seemed to have the potential to cause more harm than good.

I set out to see what could be done to rectify this regrettable situation. I found that several years previously a German organization GTZ, had made a vast collection of all crop seed varieties grown in Ethiopia. These were stored in Addis Ababa, and samples were used by European breeders to provide genetic material for crops sown by European farmers. There were comprehensive records of where each sample had been collected, so it was clear that each sample of seed represented the natural selection that had taken place, over perhaps thousands of years, to produce a variety specific to one village in one locality.

GTZ were amenable to my intention to take a sample from each batch of seed in their collection in Addis Ababa to plant in carefully isolated plots to prevent cross pollination. The seeds produced from these plots would be sent New Zealand to be grown on in isolated plots taking advantage of the seasonal difference. The system would be repeated until sufficient quantities of each distinct local variety could be stored to await the next drought, when the stocks of seed would be used to make fresh plantings when the rains arrived again. This whole operation required serious finance so I began a search for a sponsor. With a fully costed proposal, I visited the headquarters of the numerous relief and rehabilitation organizations in Europe, finally putting my proposals to the EEC in Brussels. Eventually hope developed that sufficient funds would be forthcoming.

At that moment in 1990 forces of the Tigrinian Peoples Liberation Army stormed into Addis Ababa and deposed Mengisto Heiri Mariam, the communist president who fled to Harare, Zimbabwe. The whole of Ethiopia drifted into chaos, not a good time to invest in a project like the seed bank. International agencies withdrew their personnel, and development projects were put on hold. In Switzerland I decided, that as I was now sixty years old, it was time to retire and give more time to my family. So the most worthwhile endeavour of my entire life ended in a fiasco.

**2023**

*by Chris Robertson-Parkes*

This New Year's already well underway -  
2023 - 3<sup>rd</sup> year of 21<sup>st</sup> century  
Still to come - days and weeks  
And months aplenty.

New calendars on our walls  
Marking seasons to come and go.  
Sun, rain, wind – maybe even snow!  
Whatever will be will be.

What really is ahead we wonder?  
Our lives have reasons and seasons too.  
Times of joy and gladness  
Times of dark and sadness.

But awake each new morn.  
Thanking God for all you see.  
Birds chirping their song  
Sun shining through the tree.

Take a step into this new day.  
Make it one of your best.  
Maybe just another along life's road  
Whatever – know you are blessed.



## ***Two Hearts Are Better Than One***

*by Merina Foster*

Trials and errors, I have had many. I've had a lot more fiascos than success. But I can say that I have learnt many life lessons along the way. From trials in the kitchen resulting in many errors and unsuccessful results, to taking risks and getting outstanding outcomes.



Upon thinking about the many trials and fiascos I have faced I could see a common theme that has emerged. A theme that I wish I had discovered before I even began the process of trying to solve the problems I have faced. I am sure the results would have been completely different.

For example, recently a family member had lost a book that they needed. Everyone was rushing around turning the house upside down trying to find the mystery item. I sat and watched the confusing commotion happen around me, suggesting different spots it could be hiding. Then it occurred to me about the theme I had learnt. So I decided to just remove myself and pray. I saw in my mind our wardrobe, behind a box, then behind a stuffed toy! Could God have answered this simple nonsensical prayer? I stumbled my way through the rest of my family discussing where could it be and went straight to the book of mystery!



I have discovered through the years of surviving many fiascos and trials that I can't do it on my own. I've noticed when I face an issue or need to decide on something significant, that facing the problem on my own is absolutely useless. It never works out and I usually don't achieve what I set out to do. Or if it

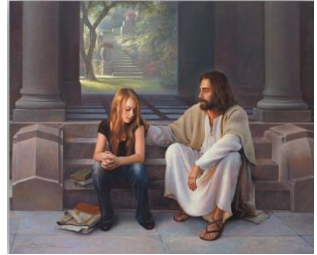
somehow seems like it may work, usually it doesn't last or there is some sort of other new complication.

Finally, I have discovered a better way to face my obstacles in life is with a friend. Two is much better than one. A friend that has my back, my best interests at heart. Someone who knows me inside and out. My friend I speak of is Jesus. He knows where I have been and where I'm going. He knows the outcome of my situation even before I try and solve it. He doesn't want to solve or fix it for me, he doesn't have a magic wand to fix everything. He wants me to learn and put my faith in him. To learn to trust and discover the discipline of patience, which a lot of the world lacks these days.



I bring my faith and relationship with Jesus into my every day, so why would I not ask him to journey with me through the trials I face in life? With him by my side my problems don't seem so huge, complicated, or unsolvable. He makes them easier to bear somehow.

Although, I must admit, sometimes his way to solve or fix things aren't quite what I had in mind or takes a lot longer than I expected. But with the knowledge that He won't let me down and will never leave me, I can hold on for dear life for the resolution to come.



We all face issues and problems in our lives, whether they are a silly lost book, or a change in occupation, relocation, health, death, finances, or relationships. But I challenge you, next time just ask him to intervene in your situation and wait on him to show you his way of solving the problem. You might be surprised. The problem may shrink to half the size it was or you might suddenly see a solution that was never there before.



I take comfort in knowing that Jesus was human too. He walked on the earth; he is the master of knowing how it feels to face trials and problems. So, surely, he's the best guide for me to turn to when I'm lost and can't seem to figure out the way.

Take refuge in the one that is light.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, 'Trust the lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your path'.





## ***The story of the Frog***

Once upon a time there was a young medical student. She was living in student dorms and sharing a room with an arts student. Now these two students had very different time commitments in their study and the medical student was required to rise early and study late. Sometimes she joined in the social activities and struggled with the early rising demanded of her. And it came to be that there was a ball at the student halls of residence. Now this ball was held the night before an early biology laboratory for the medical student.

This student decided to prepare in advance. The class was on dissecting frogs and this particular lab would be concentrating on the respiratory tract of the frog. The young woman always struggled with drawing the diagrams of her dissections as required by the lecturer. This particular week she borrowed the diagram of a fellow classmate whose lab was at a different time and carefully copied it in advance. That way, she reasoned, she could sleep in the morning following the ball and just arrive in the lab in time to dissect her frog, without needing time to do the drawing as well.

The morning after the ball she did indeed sleep in and brought her pre-drawn diagram with her to class, whereupon she dissected the respiratory system of her frog and awaited her turn for the lecturer to mark the diagram. The lecturer examined her frog and examined her drawing then asked an odd question, “What gender is your frog?”. The young student answered with a question “what does it matter (we are looking at the respiratory system, not the reproductive system)?” Her frog was female by the way.



She learned two things that day. 1) The male frog is the one with the vocal cords. 2) Be sure your sins will find you out!



## ***Kylie McIntyre - “Farmer of Endurance”!!***

They knew her voice – and they followed her cries. Having faith led a herd of 50 cows to safety and loving care.

Much grief is being suffered by many in the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle, and this heart-warming story of a farmer, who had moved her cows to higher ground earlier, checked again shortly afterwards and found them up to their necks in water.

She loves her cows and they love her. And she called to them with all her might and they swam, against the current, to safety. This is about love, protection and trust. Watching it on video was heart stopping. <http://bit.ly/3Eo9OyI>

John 10:27 “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”

Looks like it applies to cows also!

The original of this story was posted by Vet Services Waipukurau.

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## ***Christianity vs Science - War and Peace?***

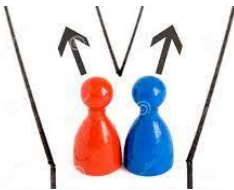
Christianity and science have a long and complicated relationship. Both the history of the relationship and its current status can be viewed in many different ways and perhaps all of them have at least a germ of truth. Many see the relationship as all about **conflict** (that is often how the media portray it). The creation story for some illustrates this. On the two extremes you have ‘creationists’ who believe in 6 literal days of creation around 4000 years ago; on the other extreme you have believers in



‘scientism’ with evolution and natural selection leaving no room for God at all. Some of the creationists ban books in USA schools which teach evolution. Scientists such as Richard Dawkins, evolutionist and writer of books such as *The Selfish Gene* and *The God Delusion*, have been very vocal insisting that evolution proves there is no god.

Is this the only way Christianity and Science can relate? Even if we look only at creation, we can see that within the Bible it is not that simple. If we were meant to take the 6 days of creation from Genesis 1 as 24-hour days, we have problems - both within the chapter itself and with the addition of a completely different creation story with everything in a different order in chapter 2. There are other scriptural writings about creation also, especially in the wisdom literature such as Psalms and the book of Job. The poetic structure of the creation story suggests it should be treated much more as mythic poetry than as scientific description. Such a view of the creation story is consistent with how scripture itself treats it and also traditional understandings of this story for centuries. The idea of the literal 6 days is of relatively recent origin. This does not at all detract from the truth and importance of the story of creation for us. A God who is creator and loves the creation, a God who brings order out of chaos, a God who is intimately involved in relating with creatures, a vocation for us as humanity to care for this world and our fellow creatures; these are some of the truths from the creation story which can shape our lives.

Another way of looking at this relationship is an **Independence model**. Here science and theology are thought about as having completely different functions. Science is about knowledge - describing and explaining the world in front of us, theology is about faith, meaning and values. This model is initially appealing until we realise that there are



areas of overlap. If we consider some of the ‘softer’ sciences such as psychology and sociology, they seem to be impinging on the territory traditionally thought to be religious, while theology also deals in knowledge as well as faith and values.

A third way of looking at the relationship is a **Dialogue model**. Science and theology having things in common (overlapping) and each enriching the other. Coming from a science background and with a faith going back to my teenage years, I find both the independence and the dialogue model to be helpful. I can still recall sitting



in a physiology lecture as a young medical student and learning about the electrical activity and muscular action of the heart. In the midst of this 'hard' science lecture, I had an epiphany. I was filled with awe as I considered that this very complex action was happening right there in my own chest 60 times a minute and I didn't even

have to think about it! Wow! I was learning science and filled with faith at the same time.

Any attempt to generalise the relationship between Christianity and science must also acknowledge that there are many expressions of Christianity and many disciplines in science.

The models of relationship discussed above are not the only possible ways that they interrelate. That there are indeed areas of tension in the relationship must be acknowledged and they do frequently serve different functions but there is also the ongoing possibility of dialogue. Truth may be stranger than fiction and today we are reminded that the truth of how science and Christianity interrelate is also more complex than fiction. It is a fine time to be alive as we explore new ways of relating and thinking. Sue+



## ***NZ Christians in Science***

New Zealand Christians in Science connects Christian scientists and resources the church, students and the wider community on faith and science.

What do we do?

NZCIS holds a full programme of lectures, webinars, seminars and conferences. These happen both nationally, online and in various locations around the country.

Our three main aims are to:

- Support Christians who work in the fields of science.
- Encourage discussion on matters of faith and science within universities, theological colleges and churches.
- Engage the public on issues of theology and its interplay with science.

NZCIS works in partnership with organisations such as ISCAST Australia; see below for more information. NZCIS has been funded for six years by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

NZCIS is committed to:

- Promoting dialogue between Christians and scientists within New Zealand society.
- Promoting and supporting Christians in the science professions, defined here as professions in the fields of science, medicine, engineering, technology and mathematics.
- Educating students and professionals in issues of intersection between the Christian faith and science.
- Promoting the integration of science and faith to the Christian churches of New Zealand.
- Promoting constructive discussion around science and Christian faith in the wider New Zealand society.
- Working actively with university students, especially science students, to promote integrative reflection and study.

If you want some stimulating reading check them out here:

<http://www.nzcis.org/blogposts/>



## ***Services for Holy Week***

Throughout the season of Lent we are reading the gospel of Matthew together following a reading plan *The Matthew Challenge*. Our Lenten study resource is *Wendell Berry and the Sabbath Poetry of Lent*.

**HOLY WEEK** begins with Palm Sunday on April 2. Each day Morning and Evening prayer will be offered in the chapel unless displaced by a different service.

Sunday April 2	Liturgy of Passion with Liturgy of the Palms - Sunday services at 8:30 and 10 am Evening prayer in the chapel 7:30pm
Monday April 3	8:00 am Morning prayer 7:30 pm Evening prayer
Tuesday April 4	8:00 am Morning prayer 7:30 pm Evening prayer
Wednesday April 5	8:00 am Morning prayer 10:00 am Mid-week communion 7:30 pm Evening Prayer
Maundy Thursday	8:00 am Morning prayer – join the regular Benedictine service 7:00 pm Liturgy of Maundy Thursday with Foot- washing, Holy Eucharist and Stripping of the Sanctuary
Good Friday April 7	8:00 am Morning prayer <i>10:00 am Ecumenical Walk of Witness (TBC)</i> 2:00 pm Liturgy of Good Friday 7:30 pm Evening Prayer
Easter Saturday	8:00 am Morning Prayer 7:30 pm Evening Prayer
Easter Sunday	10:00 am Liturgy of Easter Day with Service of Light, Renewal of Baptismal Vows and Holy Eucharist.

## ***About this Magazine***

This Magazine is called *Word and Light* because our parish church is dedicated to St John the Evangelist. At the beginning of the Gospel of John there are many powerful images. Two of these are *Word* and *Light* and they are woven together. Jesus as the *Word* of God echoes the story of creation. Jesus, the *Light* of the World, is the one who shines in the darkness.

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