Easter 5B (read only)

Programmes like Time-team have popularised the study of archaeology in our own part of the world. I’m just back from a six day visit to the Orkney isles where I visited some impressive 5000 year old sites including the burial mound at Maeshowe, the settlement at Skara Brae and the Stone Circle of Brodgar.

Many theories abound as to the significance of stone circles and how they and burial mounds are often aligned with the solar calendar. The entrance tunnel at Maeshowe, for example, is positioned in direct line with the direction of the setting sun at the winter solstice, which suggests that those who built it hoped their ancestors would somehow benefit from this event.

In our sophisticated, modern environment we sometimes imagine that we have disproved and moved beyond such hopes and expectations. However, our instinctive and natural response to the sun suggests we share a great deal with our ancestors.

The American poet, Mary Oliver, celebrates this in her poem *Why I Wake Early*

Hello, sun in my face.

Hello, you who made the morning

and spread it over the fields

and into the faces of the tulips

and the nodding morning glories,

and into the windows of, even, the

miserable and the crotchety –

best preacher that ever was,

dear star, that just happens

to be where you are in the universe

to keep us from ever-darkness,

to ease us with warm touching,

to hold us in the great hands of light –

good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day

in happiness, in kindness.

The sun still draws us out of ourselves. It warms our spirits no less than our bodies. It provides the light, warmth and energy that enable us to exist. It still has the power to help us discover that we are blessed to be alive, invited to grow, born to bear fruit.

Jesus draws on similar imagery when he compares us to the branches on a vine. God is the benevolent vinedresser who does all he can to make the harvest as rich as possible. The pruning has but one purpose, to stimulate new growth. We can be part of this miracle by keeping close to Christ, abiding in him, basking in the warmth of his light and love.

When we feel such warmth we want to grow, we want to bear fruit. It’s not a chore, it’s our instinctive response. When we know we are loved we begin to love in return.

Our ancestors drew their own conclusions about this gift and shaped their world with monuments to express their hopes. Like them we too can engage with this gift by keeping close to Christ who is the manifestation of God’s dream. Christ is the one who roots our lives in the life of God.

As the French philosopher Simone Weil put it. “It is the light falling continually from heaven which alone gives a tree the energy to send powerful roots deep into the earth. The tree is really rooted in the sky.”

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