

A recent service included news of Leicester City of Sanctuary and a dedication of a young child. John Rackley, Baptist minister reflects on the occasion.

I start with two quotations from the bible which emphasise the value and significance of each life. Each of us is unique – this is what it means to be made in the image of God.

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
My frame was hidden, when I was made in secret,
Intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
In your book, O God, were written
All the days that were formed for me,
When none of them yet existed.
The Psalmist No 139*

*Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap
Nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them,
Are you not of more value than the birds?
Jesus in Matthew Ch6*

A scientist wrote a poem about his new-born daughter for the day of her baptism. As he contemplated her life he could not forget his scientific background. He wrote with a Christian faith.
*The day the universe started,
creation's dawn still burning bright,
the smallest parts of you existed
within that energy and light.*

*And over time, with space expanding
God let your atoms form above
In ways beyond our understanding
while God imagined you, in love.*

*Our Father breathed upon earth's features
and life sprang up in every part:
a home for you and all God's creatures;
a place to grow, and know his heart.*

*Through many years of preparation
God dreamed your days and saw your face
and paved the way for your salvation
with suffering love and endless grace.*

*And now you enter this great story;
a work of art by God's own hand,
moulded from all creation's glory,
a life completely loved and planned.*

*The ways of God remain a mystery
But, child, our Lord has given you
This special place in time and history,*

That you may come to love him too.

Andrew T Murphy is a Methodist minister working in Leicestershire.

He echoed the words of Paul the Apostle

For we are what he has made us,

Created in Christ Jesus for good works,

Which God prepared beforehand

To be our way of life.

Paul in Ephesians Ch2

In his book: Anam Cara John O'Donohue writes

Humans are new here.

Above us the galaxies dance out towards infinity.

Under our feet is ancient earth.

We are beautifully moulded from this clay.

Yet the smallest stone is millions of years older than us.

We are characters in a production that's been running for 14 billion years, and our roles were written for us long before we appeared on the scene.

All of us are on the stage at the moment; we have our part and then will disappear

Like the 100 billion human beings who preceded us.

And that's why a dedication is so important for Gabriel but it is more than a pleasant child-centred occasion for us all.

And that's why City of Sanctuary is more than a crucial piece of human care or social justice.

They emerge from the faith, conviction that we, each of us are no accident.

We each have a part to play in the great story of this universe.

We are part of the great weaving of life.

Donald Nichol who was Director of the Tantur Institute in Bethlehem writes of a time when he descended the five mile path down into the Grand Canyon.

As you descend you can observe the walls. They are made of layer upon layer of the sediments that have formed over millions of years, and you can relate those layers to the successive species of living creatures, both fauna and flora, that dwelt upon the earth before we appeared: Permian ferns and crinoids and armour-plated fish.

Observing the traces of them in this way I felt a true kinship with all those forms of life; with them I had to trace our existence back to the first moment of transcendence when life appeared on this earth.

And then I realised that the very eyes with which I was observing all this are themselves the result of millions of years of striving for light, ever since the first pin-hole appeared on those primitive marine creatures, the cephalopods.

I, you and I are the beneficiary of that entire struggle for light, the heir of all that agony. Had any breakdown in that series of stirrings occurred at any time, it could have destroyed that possibility for us to hear and see and sing. The breakdown was prevented by the untiring faithfulness on the part of millions of beings.

And then he concluded with this:

As I arrived breathless and hot 7,000 feet below the ridge at the top, the level at which we now live; I knew what an incredibly hard-won privilege it is simply to be a human being; and at the same time it is an awesome responsibility. Every human being has a responsibility towards all those creatures whose agony and groaning has given us birth.

And I must add **and to all those who will follow after us.**

Prayer

Eternal Spirit, Father and Mother of us all, in your wisdom and through your imagination we have received the gift of life.

Create in us a delight in the dawn of each new day.

Lead us into paths of wisdom that fit the times in which we live.

Inspire in us a joyful imagination for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours forever and ever. Amen