



everyone an artist, everyone a scientist

I had never heard of a thing called a Fun Palace until our Deputy Church Warden and Sustainability Champion Deborah Colvin uttered the phrase earlier this year.

The original concept of a Fun Palace was created by the theatre director Joan Littlewood and her friend the architect Cedric Price in 1961. They conceived the idea of holding a mini festival of art and science which they called a “laboratory of fun” and “a university of the streets”. 2014 was the centenary of Joan Littlewood’s birth and so a national movement was started to encourage fun palaces – local festivals of arts and science, transforming well known spaces and transforming the makers in the making too. And so this weekend we are part of a national two days of Fun Palaces all over the UK. In Folkestone, yesterday a Fun Palace themed on the sea was held and in Lancaster, juggling lessons in the market square are combined with a ukulele orchestra performance open to all comers.

For us at St James’s this year, we are combining a Christian celebration of Creation with this contemporary movement to hold an Eco Fun Palace. For the rest of the day today, we will be hosting a large number of activities, discussions in our church, courtyard and garden. We will be whittling wood, lighting fires, learning about our own DNA, and very importantly, getting to know the amazing scientific neighbours we have in our parish right here in Piccadilly. We are really delighted to be partnering with The Linnean Society, the Royal Society of Chemistry, learning about the geology beneath the pavements we walk on every day with the Geological Society and right by the font, where we use H₂O all the time to baptise, we will be making hydrogen bombs – small ones I understand. I think it’s possible that baptism will never feel the same again.

The motto for the Fun Palace movement is “everyone an artist, everyone a scientist” and there can’t be a better way to celebrate Harvest, and to join the creativity of all that is.

This motto, which refuses to separate art and science was in my mind as I watched the extraordinary end to the journey of the Rosetta probe this week too. Perhaps like you, I found watching the space scientists who have worked on this project for 30 years – a working lifetime – lose the signal of the probe as it crash landed into the comet it had been studying – both impressive and moving. The probe spent 10 years travelling from Earth to Comet 67P and since 2014 when it arrived, it has sent back extraordinary data which will keep scientists busy for decades. Comets are huge icy dirt-balls that wander among the planets and this is the very first time that their structure and chemistry can be assessed in such detail. This data will give us clues about how life on earth began, and will further deepen our understanding of our place in our universe among universes.

Far from being a threat to faith, as Galileo and Copernicus’s explorations were deemed to be centuries earlier, these amazing pictures for me evoke the kind of awe, the kind of wonder, that is intrinsic to faith in God who is beyond all imagining. In what I hope is a statement true to scientific projects, the more we find out, the more we realise we don’t know. And we know that there are things we can’t know. Wonderful. And it doesn’t stop us trying to know them either. Even more wonderful.

It struck me too that the way that this mission of Rosetta came to an end brought together both the best of human scientific expertise and poetic imagination. Science and art were inseparable. What I mean by that is that this probe; this mechanical data

gathering object, was given a name, after the Rosetta stone which lives close by this church in the British Museum; the stone that translates, that unlocks the secret languages of the past. Scientists were tearful as the planned crash landing happened and the signal fell silent; and one spoke to this machine "Goodbye old friend: you did well".

This is a machine.

But we can't help naming even machines – just as Adam did in Genesis. It's part of the human instinct to name and explore that has sent us into the skies in the first place. By using our human poetic imagination, in naming Rosetta and investing so much hope in it, art and science were fused. Rosetta's crash was a death in a way and the mourning of scientists who have spent years listening for the voice of the probe, was evident as the moment came when they knew they would never hear it again. And Rosetta itself, having circled the comet for such a long time, attentive, curious, has now destroyed itself on the object of its affection. A potent script for a love story if ever one was written. There is therefore both triumph and tragedy in this story of scientific exploration and although everyone might be telling themselves – it's just a machine – it won't feel like that and clearly hasn't felt like that for the scientists involved.

It's well documented that the creation stories of Genesis venerated by Jews and Christians have not always been helpful in interpreting how people of faith can interact with the natural world. Christian theology has encouraged an assumption of domination over other creatures and plants, and has encouraged a utilitarian attitude – that the natural world is there primarily as a set of resources for humans to use. Thankfully, Christian theology, especially in the last 50 years, has completely reversed this understanding and has even moved away from the sense that humans are "stewards" of creation as one of the Genesis stories has it. Christian theology and Creation doctrine will now more readily emphasise our interdependence with all that is, not our domination of it or even our stewardship of

it. And now, taking our cue from the rhythm of the Hebrew of Genesis, we understand that the momentum of creation – through Day One, to Day Six all points towards, not the creation of human beings, but what comes after that on Day Seven – which is Sabbath. The trajectory of the story of Creation leads us not to the Creation of ourselves albeit late in the day as it was, but beyond us to Day Seven when Sabbath – the day of rest and worship – is instituted.

Sabbath is not a day to recover from the busyness of the previous six days. Sabbath is what it has all been pointing towards – Sabbath is what it has all been for. Sabbath is the weekly jubilee, the day of days, the utter giving over of the Creation to the Creator in thanksgiving and joy and praise.

And this idea of Sabbath – Sabbath day and Sabbath time – is something that Jesus reinterpreted in his own teaching and ministry. Not least in today's gospel.

At the core of our living as humans made in the image of God is Sabbath: eternal peace, a lively, attentive rest in the presence of God. Sabbath time is measured in moments not minutes. It is God's time and we are asked to come to a deep acceptance in this Sabbath perspective simply that I am here and now is what there is. This is who I am. This is who God is. And I am at one with all that lives and moves, at one with the one who created all things. It is true, lively rest.

Do not worry says Jesus to the crowd in today's gospel – do not worry about your life – and in typically robust terms, he reminds them – can you by worrying add one single hour to your life? No.

This is true Sabbath; where I have things in perspective, in the right place. I have a longer and deeper appreciation of what it is to be alive. And the corrosive anxiety – the anxiety that goes over the past or endlessly anticipates the future – is laid to rest because all I know is that I am here now. And you are here now. And God is here now.

Deep and lively rest, even in the midst of all my toiling and spinning as Jesus puts it, is

knowing who I am, to whom I belong and to whom I must return.

And you know what happens then, when we are rooted and anchored in this Sabbath perspective? A miracle happens. We become truly fearless. We become completely fearless; and free of the paralysing expectations, judgements, assessments with which daily life is filled. Fearless, the better to acknowledge that we are fundamentally connected to all that lives, even to the rock and the ice alongside all that lives.

Today is our Sabbath – and we are here together in God's time celebrating life in this Eucharist. And what better way to be together on the Sabbath than in a palace having fun, getting to know each other and exploring the boundless creativity of God by learning more about the world around us. If like me your science lessons at school alternated between what seemed like hours of tedium with iron filings, and hoping you could blow up the lab with your Bunsen burner, then maybe stay to have some grown up fun with people who are passionate about the natural world who can infuse us with similar passion.

Rosetta has fallen silent. And as we gaze in awe at the sky, and at the minute detail of mitochondria, we might be able to learn to say with William Blake, his lines that are on our notice boards outside this church. That it is our life long task.....

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*