

1 John 3:1-7 The Love Lavished Upon Us
April 14, 2024

Last week, I mentioned the assertion associated with modernity, that there is, “a natural explanation for everything.” My mind was on the biblical distinction between the natural and the supernatural, a distinction that insists that the previous statement isn’t true, there *are* some things that cannot be explained naturally, leaving us with the idea of two realms, the spiritual and the material.

The two realms, or orders of life, are related, and certainly overlap, but they are distinct. The Doctrine of Creation teaches that the material world has been created by God, who is spirit, “out of nothing.” Additionally, to “live by faith” is a way of giving precedent to the spiritual realm because it has to do with the higher aspects of our lives. It is the realm of love and hate, of sin and forgiveness, good and evil.

It is the place of relationship, in which there are a vast array of experiences. And we have an entire vocabulary that we only know in the context of relationships; such as honor and dishonor, responsibility and irresponsibility, honesty and dishonesty. We know about envy, fear, jealousy, and the like on the one hand; as well as friendship, kindness, generosity, compassion etc. on the other. We speak of peace and hope. These are only the tip of the iceberg.

The biblical idea is that the most important realities in life *are spiritual*, and they do not well submit to natural explanations. Thus, “supernatural,” which means, that which is over, or superior to the natural. *We are not* mere animals. There is more than what meets the eye. I stand by this understanding of things because it seems to me to be obviously true, and has the benefit of being in line with biblical thought.

But in a certain way the distinction between natural explanations and the invocation of the supernatural, misses the point. It seems important also to expose the shortcomings inherent in this divided understanding of the world.

It is the spirit of the modern age to believe that there *is* a natural explanation for everything, thus an invoking of the supernatural is not necessary to understand life as we experience it. The supernatural, of course, is often associated, even equated with, the miraculous, which diminishes it, and sometimes even the magical, which misrepresents it altogether.

One might be asked:

Do you believe there is a natural explanation for everything? *Or:*

Do you believe in miracles?

Some may reject the way the questions are formulated, many would say they accept both. One wonders why the questions are not nuanced by the

realization that the natural order *is, in itself, miraculous*. When approached this way, the distinction is blurred.

The vast expanse of interstellar space, the boggling complexity of microbiology; the natural world all around us everyday, of which we are a part, can only be described as miraculous, even if there *is* a natural way of understanding it. The questions, as previously stated, involves a false dichotomy.

One cannot help but think of the solar eclipse this last Monday. The people in the path of totality were caught up in it, for a total eclipse is very different from a partial one. Some spoke of it as a supernatural event, though it very definitely has a natural explanation. It speaks to the order in the universe in such a way as to imply an orderer, that it happened as an effect of God's design.

But everything about our experience of life has the same character. The wonder and beauty, and sometimes the horror of nature is around us everyday. The cycle of the seasons, animal life and plant life, the ocean panoramas and mountain heights and canyon depths speak of the supernatural. And they all can be explained naturally.

The phenomenon of self-consciousness, and knowledge and thought, and the mysterious interactions of relationships, *are miraculous*, even if we see them everyday and take them for granted and maybe even discuss them as ordinary because we

think we can explain them as natural. Maybe all I am trying to say is that ordinary life is not ordinary.

And there is more that must be said, about the higher aspects of life. In the text from the epistle reading this morning, we catch a glimpse of it:

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called, ‘children of God!’ And that is what we are.” In every language there is a word for, “love.” And here one of those words is attached to God, and to us.

“Dear friends, now we are children of God,” we, in our earthly, this worldly, physical form. Paul said in 2 Corinthians, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.”

And not only love, but goodness and righteousness, or in the case of 1 John, purity, which is a loaded word. Everything that has a natural explanation and everything that doesn't, is bound up by these two words, “love and goodness.”

For, “everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as he (Jesus) is pure.” We must consider this purity in the broad sense, meaning, without the mixture of contradictory factors or excessive self-concern.

Love lavished upon us, that is the way John put it. And that we are God's children. It means that because we have been so loved, we make it our primary goal and the object of our greatest effort to, “purify

ourselves,” which means to repent and live towards God.

John was so caught up in it that if we are not careful we will misunderstand him, he tells us that those who live in Him (Jesus) will stop sinning. And since each of us can only very dishonestly claim to have no sin, we might have to concede that we have not seen, or known him. Anyway the condition of the world and the church bears witness to *our* failures in this regard.

Yet, since John has already told us that if we say we have no sin, we are lying, and that if we confess, God is faithful and just to forgive, we do not take John at his word in the most literal sense. He means that in God’s grace we will work on repentance and faith, on love and good deeds, on compassion and forgiveness. There is no better time than Easter for these considerations.

All of life is one grand miracle of love. Often we are inspired by what we cannot explain, or by the natural phenomena that only come around every few decades, but however one accounts for it, we forge ahead in faith, disciplined, chastened, by our failures but not destroyed by them, trusting God, giving others the benefit of the doubt as they make their way to heaven, as we make our way to heaven, for the love lavished upon us.

And that is a miracle.

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