

Along the track

Spiders that Sail

Scientists in Britain have discovered that an ordinary little spider, one we have all seen hundreds of times, is actually a very adept sailor. Some species of spider form diving bells out of silk to enable them to breathe under water. All the spiders examined by scientists were able to stand on water thanks to their water-repellent legs. They showed off sailing skills, catching the wind and cruising forward by making 'sails' from parts of their bodies. Some pointed two forelegs up in a V-shape, while others thrust their abdomen skyward – the equivalent of a handstand on the water.

This humble little spider has been sailing over ponds and rivers and creeks for thousands of years. And we just found out about it! And we think we know it all!

Nature reveals her wonders every day. New technologies allow us to go to ocean depths not accessible before and a whole new world has opened up before us, previously undiscovered species, new creatures, new forms of life. And they have been there for centuries and centuries. Space travel is revealing new planets, new moons, new galaxies. So are more and more sophisticated telescopes. The microscope can reveal the intricacies of plant and animal life not visible to the naked eye.

The wonders of creation are continually revealed in her incredible ingenuity and in her beauty, in the thousands of ways she has adapted to changing circumstances, in the unending variety and splendour that we are continuing to discover. For some, that is enough, just to be amazed by the wonder and design of all that is around us, for the way things have evolved. For others that is not enough.

Thousands of years ago, poor suffering Job had some advice:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the Earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:7-10

Faith is the key that enables us to see the wonders of the Creation as well as the love of its Creator. For some, that is delusional, fantasy as it were. But faith is far from that. Faith is both a challenge and a responsibility. It invites us to take time to feel the presence of the Creator all around us, in the beauty, the power, the wonder and awe of the greatest and smallest of things. Faith challenges us to wonder and question – how did all this happen and why?

Faith also challenges us to take on responsibility for creation. The Creation story is a picture of what life could be. The Creation story reveals that creation is "good". Our Christian faith asks us to have a genuine love for the world. The Garden of Eden is not so much a place but rather a state of mind, an ideal, a vision to work towards where we can recognise God's presence and purpose, where we grow to live in harmony with God, with each other and with God's creation.

Faith challenges us not to be seduced by superiority, that we are above all and everything is made for our use, the creed of consumerism. Faith reminds us that we too are here as part of creation, not just as consumers of it. We are here to care for this planet, not to dominate or exploit it. We are here to find our proper place in it, to grow with it spiritually as well as physically.

Sr Joan Chittister sums it up rather succinctly:

We know now that if human beings disappeared tomorrow, the existence of birds, insects, water creatures, and land animals wouldn't be affected at all. If animals disappeared tomorrow, on the other hand, human beings could not possibly live without them—even the smallest of bees are needed to pollinate plants. As the top of the food chain, we would be the first to go.... The Creator of all, the scriptures tell us, saw all of creation as "good". It is our role to protect it, to guard it, to develop it, to sustain it—not to destroy it for our own purposes.

What will you do today to care for creation? Will you take a moment to stop and enjoy the wonders of it?

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au