

How do we know that God exists ?

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God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:
grant that your people may be fervent
in the fellowship of the gospel
that always abiding in you
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service.

Our text may be found in today's Psalm, Psalm 19 and verse 1:

'The heavens declare the glory of God
And the firmament shows his handiwork.'

I want to pose one of life's difficult questions. Today I'd like to ask the question, 'How do we know that God exists ?'

It's a good question but I'm not sure there is or can be a definite answer this side of the grave. If we do have the freedom to choose, then one choice must surely be whether to believe or not. If God did not leave us the space to doubt, then there would be no merit in our faith and our choice to believe in him. But if we do believe in God – and we will all make such a statement shortly after this sermon – then what possible grounds do we have we for believing in him ?

I'd like to start with the idea of intuition. We know something is true because we intuitively know it's true. We have a feeling about something, sometimes a gut-feeling. There might be little actual evidence for why we know what we know but we just do because it feels right. Of course, intuition can be spectacularly wrong but more often than not, it's spot on. What I like to start off with is the notion that we can know God exists because the existence of God intuitively feels right to us.

The second idea is down to education, the culture in which we were brought up. Our homes, our parents' belief and practice, the schools we went to, the places of worship we attended, all surrounded us with the idea that there is a God and that he is very much present in the world in which we live and the lives which we lead. We know God exists as an article of faith because that belief is part of the education which we have received from our families, from our schools, from our church. We take belief on trust because the belief is sourced by those and by what we trust

The third idea is evidence and I'd like simply to focus on one piece of evidence which is embodied in today's text:

‘The heavens declare the glory of God
And the firmament shows his handiwork.’

If God is out there, then there should be some sign that he is out there. Unless he's very good at hiding, then there ought to be traces of him, like for example footprints in the sand. So one classic proof for the existence of God is the existence of the universe, the world in which we live, the fact that we're alive.

Looking up at the sky, the Psalmist saw what he considered to be clear proof that God exists. To his ear, it was like a glorious song of creation: the beauty and majesty of the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars all combining in a great hymn of praise to the creator to whom they owe their existence. For the Psalmist, all we had to do to see proof of God was to look up at his wonderful creation which is his handiwork.

Of course, as I said at the start of the sermon, you don't have to believe. There is reasonable space to doubt and someone like Professor Richard Dawkins would encourage us to do so, encourage our doubt and our disbelief, encourage us to regard God's creation as a random act of pure chance. But I think not. I prefer to believe that the universe in which we live and move and have our being is purposeful and designed by a God who loves us.

Nevertheless, we all have a choice whether to believe or not and that choice is individually yours. But the fact that you have bothered to come here today to worship God suggests what that choice might be.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

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H: Sermon 26 : How know

