

“Come, Let us Reason Together”
Acts 17:1-15

It's one of my favorite scenes from one of my favourite movies featuring one of my favourite actors. Here Indiana Jones from “The Last Crusade” stands before a great chasm facing his third and final test to save his Dad (Sean Connery) from a sure and certain death, unless he can get to the other side and retrieve the chalice of Christ. But why explain it when you can watch it. (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-JlfjNnnMA>)

If you didn't pick up on it the only clue Indie was given was “a leap of faith” but at first he didn't quite understand - that is – until he literally took a leap, a “leap of faith. Faith, for many, is believed to be a leap, but not necessarily for the Apostle Paul. His story, if you are not too familiar with him, begins just a few chapters previously. At the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, a young ladder-climbing insider by the name of Saul was present. Saul was seen like the new district attorney riding into town to rid the community of all the riff raff. And Christians seemed to be at the top of the heap. So like when the politician crosses the chamber floor or the sports star leaves to play for the rival imagine what others thought when persecutor Saul becomes follower Paul. It was quite a “leap” and one that could only be considered unreasonable. Had not Paul been *educated* by one of the finest Rabbi's of the day? Had not the full range of theological, psychological, and sociological resources been opened to him? Had he not listened to some of the brightest minds of the days in Synagogue? What had happened for Paul to apparently chuck reason for faith, throw away science for belief? That's what people say, you know. Maybe someone has said it to you. But Paul did not put aside his academic intellect when he became a Christian or his reasoning mind when he accepted Jesus. I say this because of what we read in Acts 17.

The story apparently begins like other similar passages. After Paul had encountered Jesus on the Damascus Road and was transformed he then travelled many other roads to many other places, making disciples. The journey taken in Acts 17 is Paul's “Second Missionary Journey” or an extended missions trip to visit and/or establish new churches. On this particular journey, Paul sojourned on the well-traveled road known as The Egnatian Way, which crossed the whole present-day area of northern Greece. The city of Thessalonica was central to the area and a prominent city of 200,000 people, including a colony of Jews of whom Paul visited first.

That short and overlooked concept might surprise you because if you remember, Paul's mission from the beginning was primarily to the Gentiles, or non-Jews so what was Paul doing in the “Jewish” Synagogue? But this seems to be his routine, as Luke tells us, and it seems to be true because Paul did this in Thessalonica and Berea. Again if you read on quickly you might think you have the answer, at least according to our New Revised translation. It sounds like Paul did not show

up at the Synagogue because he simply could not shake the tradition or wanted to see old friends or colleagues but to “argue.” Did you notice that word in our passage? It sounds reasonable, if you think about it. If your fellow politicians or your former teammates didn’t switch parties/teams like you did would you not go back and “argue” with them? The trouble, however, is that the NRSV’s translation from the original Greek is not a great translation. In fact, translations like the NIV and KJV and others do a better job translating the Greek word *dialegomai*. Dialegomai. Dialegomai. Can you hear an English word there? Dialegomai. Dialogue. Paul was there to dialogue. Paul did not go to argue but to dialogue about God, which is not easy, is it? How difficult is it for you to bring up “God” at the rink or in line at Zehrs or at the water cooler at work? But maybe it’s easier in a religious facility among spiritual people? Or maybe it was the “kind” of dialogue? You see, there is an even better English word for the Greek *dialegomai* and it’s the word “reason.” Yes, Paul liked to argue but Paul like reasoning even more. I know to some, maybe even to you, reason and faith seem like polar opposites like an oxymoron, like found missing, seriously funny, deafening silence or Microsoft Works. Here Paul was “reasoning from the Scriptures,” “explaining” and “proving” matters of faith (in Paul’s case it was about Jesus’ life and death) with those he was speaking with. So maybe faith is not the blind leap we see in the Last Crusade and could even be a problem with the kind of faith we are trying to live out or believe we must live out and the kind of faith we are taking into the world to make disciples. Maybe faith is far more “reasonable” than we think.

So it’s reasonable to think that “Someone” must have made all that we can see, hear and touch. It’s reasonable to think that Someone who made all of “this” is the greatest Scientist imaginable who can make insects like bumblebees, who should not be able to fly, fly or ants to carry hundreds of times their own weight. It’s reasonable to imagine that humanity is not some cosmic accident but crafted by a Designer, like the world has never known, and who created each and every person, as unique as a snowflake. It’s reasonable that this Creator loves and enjoys what They have made and cares how that creation is treated – and will do what is necessary to reach out and be involved in the lives of what has been made. It’s reasonable to imagine that this Creator loves the creation and wants to be communicate with it and Who wants creation to communicate back. Is it not reasonable to think that the Creator cares how we, the created, live and treat one another and treat the One who has made us? It’s reasonable that life has consequences, just as the world itself does. If a wave crashes along the shore does not erosion occur? If we do an unkind act to another, does it not have repercussions on the relationship of the other? Is it not reasonable to think that there is good and evil, right and wrong and certain things are right and certain things are wrong? It is reasonable, is it not, to declare there is absolute truth, that some things are wrong, and will always be wrong and is not dependent on what any of us say? Could not the best selling Book in the world be such for a

reason and that it not an accident that millions have been transformed simply because they saw it as introducing them to a God who loves them more than they could imagine? Could this story be our story? Is it not reasonable to think that One who made us would wants the best for us, to live with us forever but is it also not reasonable to think that some would not want this and therefore choose to be separate them from Him and being the perfect Gentleman, He grants them their wish? And what if this Creator has a name. And what if He would go to any length to keep us in this relationship? Would it not be reasonable that He would want this? I mean is it not reasonable to think that to mend a broken relationship (and we can assume it is broken, right) that He would do something that we could not do ourselves? And I know it sound unreasonable, like us trying to protect an anthill and its inhabitants from a rain storm but what if this Creator, this God, this Jesus did, the lengths he would go, would go (get ready for this) to do whatever was necessary to not lose us – like jumping into a raging sea and risk his own life to save ours, is exactly what Jesus did, did just for you, but he didn't save Himself but gave Himself up for you. If God was willing to do such a thing is it not reasonable to say you owe Him something? `Now some of us might have something that is valuable, even a few things that are worth some money, right? I mean if we “cashed out all our possessions,” as it were, sold everything we had, we would have something, maybe even a lot of something. But others of us, don't have much, we don't own much, even much that is valuable. So what would we do? But we all have something else, something money can't buy. We are valuable. We are alive. We are worth something. So what if this giving involved Jesus simply wanting us. And what if all we owed Him, was ourselves? And I'm not talking about “owing,” as in paying back but “owing” as in giving back something out of love and appreciation of what this One has done for us, as undeserving as we are? Is it not reasonable then to think that giving ourselves would mean everything? It's like dating someone that you are absolutely head over heels in love for. You would do anything to make them happy. You would even change the way you live because of this deep love. But maybe you're not quite sure what is expected of you, how to live, if you know what I mean? What then? Well, what if it's all written down - not just this whole story of creation and relationship, failure, sacrifice and restoration but a story that shows us how to live. What if the lesson for us is to take what God has told us, in His Word, I mean take things literally (just hear me out for a second) take God's Word as he intended it and not how some want you to hear it or the world who says they have a better way and simply take God's Word to heart. I know what you are thinking – you're asking me to take a leap of faith. But you now know I'm not asking you to do that at all. What I am asking you, what God is asking you is to take God at His Word because its reasonable.

So what if this narrative that once began as a story but people thought it could one day be forgotten or told “incorrectly” wrote it down and it survived till this vey day? Is it not reasonable to

imagine that the One, who is the main character in our story, could inspire those who wrote the story and make sure the story was true and accurate? Is it not reasonable then to suppose that what we have before us, that Book that sits on our shelves, could be that very Book and ought to become the most important Book in our lives? It is reasonable that although many refute, criticize and even misuse it does not weaken its significance to the world and our lives, but even more, the lives of those who have never even heard the story. So is not reasonable to see ourselves as the carriers of this message, people who live out the message of these ancient pages?

I don't think what I have told you is too unreasonable, right? So let us sit down and speak together about this Story. Let us impress this story of grace and love, judgment "upon our children. Let's talk about them when we sit at home and when we walk along the road, when we lie down and when we get up. Let's tie them as symbols on our hands and bind them on our foreheads and as we write them on the doorframes of our houses and on our gates. (Deut 6:7-8) For God's word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances. I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word. Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your ordinances. I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end." (Psalm 119:105-112) "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," (2 Tim 3:16) Come let us reason together because it's the reasonable thing to do.