

In our element

Kathryn Fleming *reflects on* Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:7-end; 1 Peter 3:13-end and John 14:15-21

God is our natural element! That's the message emerging loud and clear from Paul's words to the Athenians, those relentless seekers after novelty with a side-order of truth. Imagine a busy city, crowded with sightseers, traders and wannabe philosophers. Among them wanders the apostle, in tourist mode but still alert, expecting to meet God here. I think Paul must have become the sort of instinctive preacher who sees almost everything as a sermon illustration, so the altar with the inscription "To an unknown god" was a gift.

It intrigues me that the devout Athenians had hedged their bets, recognising that they weren't likely to have discovered all there was to know about the divine, leaving a door open for something more. While they are thinking in terms of a "what" – a god created by human hands to meet human needs – Paul seizes the opportunity to introduce them to a "who" – and points out that actually they've known God all along.

A Chinese proverb asserts, "If you want to learn about water, don't ask a fish," because when you're immersed in something you just don't notice it. This is the point that Paul makes to the Athenians – and it's good for us to be reminded too. God is all about us – and usually closer than we think. Open your eyes to see God today, in creation, in one another, in word and sacrament. 🍷

God, you hold us secure day by day. Awaken us to your presence. Let us breathe in your peace, reflect your light and share your love, so that you may be known throughout creation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

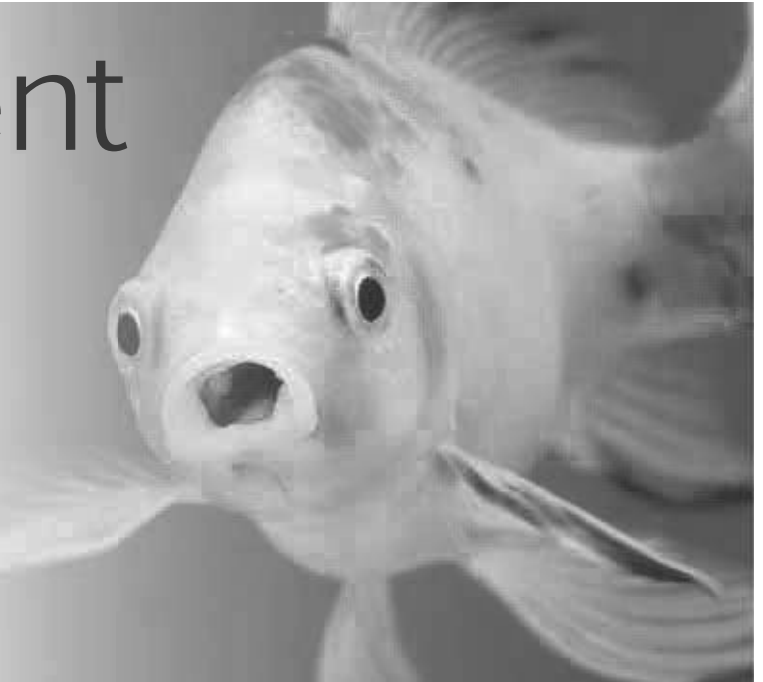
Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Now that the lambs are growing well with their mothers and the orphans are continuing to make their way on the bottle, it's the turn of the poultry. Keeping rare breed animals and birds so that the breeds survive and flourish is important even on a

smallholding, and so I put a dozen eggs in the incubator. These are special. Shetland ducks are really very rare now but are characterful, adventurous, black and white ducks with a beautiful green sheen which lay eggs and taste good.

I managed to hatch eight from a dozen eggs and watched them move from bedraggled wet creatures coming out of the shell to fluffy Disney-like ducklings. Without raising these lovely creatures they would disappear as a breed. That variety in creation would be lost and we would all be the poorer. God's variety is too precious to waste. 🍷



Science and faith Part 2 – God in the heavens

by Caroline Hodgson

The idea that the Earth is flat was discounted by serious thinkers even before the time of Jesus, when Aristotle (384-322 BC) pointed out that anyone travelling south would see southern constellations rising above the horizon. When, in Egypt, Ptolemy (AD 100-170) formulated his view of the universe, it was based upon the understanding that the Earth is spherical, although his theory placed Earth – and humankind – at the centre.

Polish astronomer Copernicus (1473-1543) formulated a "heliocentric" view, suggesting the sun is the fixed point

around which the other planets revolve. At first this was surprisingly uncontroversial. In the Reformation, Protestant objections to heliocentrism were based upon biblical literalism. Martin Luther (1483-1546) is said to have called Copernicus a "fool".

In the seventeenth century, Galilei's (1564-1642) systematic observation of the heavens led him to a heliocentric view that, in turn, led the Catholic Church to declare him a heretic. Isaac Newton (1642-1727) removed all doubt about heliocentrism, but it wasn't until Apollo 8 circled the Moon in 1968, that humans first witnessed an orb floating in the inky darkness of space – the Earth that Christians celebrate as God's astonishing creation. 🍷

“People think of science as rolling back the mystery of God. I look at science as slowly creeping toward the mystery of God.”

Allan J. Hamilton (born 1950), American physician and author