

Sunday May 3rd, Easter IV , 2020

Acts 2:42-end; Jn.10:1-10

Life in all its fullness.

Why do you think the world exists?

Not *how* do you think it exists. How did it come into being. We know the answer to that: a Big Bang, billions and billions of years, dust swirling around, and forming into planets, and the theory of evolution We're pretty good on *how* all this came to be.

But *why*? What is it all *for*?

Now *that* question is pretty much the fundamental distinction between a believer in God and a non-believer. The believer thinks – or trusts – that the world is *for* something. That there is, behind everything, some kind of intent. And that presupposes, of course, some kind of Intender – something like a Mind, which we call God.

The atheist thinks, by contrast, that there is no *for*. There is no intent, no reason why everything exists, nothing it was meant to do. It just is. We just are, end of. Of course, we then come up with values and purposes and things that we think are very important – justice, truth, goodness - but that's all they are: things we think. We don't discover them, we *invent* them. They are not, as it were, written into the very heart of reality.

Now, we can debate which of those stances is more rational another time.

My point this morning is simply that Christians think the answer to the question, 'what's it all for?' is to be found in Jesus Christ. In him, says St. Paul to the Colossians, all things hang together. He is the beginning, the end, all things were created through him and for him. You could spend a lifetime meditating on those words and not quite get to the bottom, but something of what they mean is this: when you look at Jesus Christ, you see the point of creation. You see what creation was meant to be.

And what do you see? You see beauty and brilliance. You see a life which touches everyone and everything around with life. You see crippled people standing up straight; you see wicked people starting again; you see dead people restored to life. You see joy, surging in such power that nothing can stop it, not even hammers and nails and great big boulders sealing up tombs. You see power and goodness and generosity and love shining brighter than a thousand suns.

And *that*, Christianity says, is what the world is *for*. The heavens proclaim the glory of the Lord, says the Psalm, and the Lord's Prayer looks for earth to be like heaven. The whole thing, me and you and everything, is to be shot through with the life that was in Jesus. That's what John says at the beginning of his Gospel: 'In him was *life*, and the life was the life of all people.' (1:4). It's what Jesus says this morning: 'I've come that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness.' (10:10)

But – the world is not like that. In Jesus' words, thieves and bandits have come, and they came to steal and kill and destroy. They are all around us: fear. Violence. Lust. Greed – whatever it is that takes us and twists, stops us from being the sunburst of glory we were made to be. Behind them all, working through them all, lurk the two great bandit lords of Sin and Death. They are the ones that have taken God's good world and made it a place of misery. They are the ones that turned it small and drab and grey.

'I've come that they may have life, and have it in all its fullness.' Jesus of Nazareth, the man of brightness, the man of life in all its fullness, the man filled with all the splendour of God, strides into the world of darkness and shadow. The Bandit lords surround him. They menace him, bide their time till on Good Friday they strike. They hang the man of brightness on the cross, and they smash him there.

And this, the bandits think, is their moment of triumph. But instead, there is mystery. When they smash Jesus open, his brightness does not fade: it flows. It bursts out of Him. It pours, like a river, it pours into all the dry and small and grey world, and it never stops pouring. It begins to flood. It seeps into every last hard, dry, dark place and the brightness begins there too. The earth shall be filled with the glory of God, and it begins from the cross.

And it's really important to see what *doesn't* happen. When the disciples first meet the risen Jesus, how do they know who he is? He shows them his scars – the marks of the crucifixion.

Whenever the brightness overtakes a person, whenever we are caught up in the splendour of God, that doesn't happen in such a way that everything else about us is just cancelled, or deleted. You might have suffered terribly. You might have inflicted terrible suffering. The brightness doesn't undo that. Nothing can. It is, unalterably, part of your story. But whereas before it threatened to become the whole story, whereas once it threatened to suck everything into its pit – now there is something bigger and brighter and deeper than even the worst thing imaginable. Now there is something that can take even that, and without denying it, heal it – and bring you into brightness. Whatever the bandit lords have done to you; whatever you've helped them do – none of it is the end. The end, thanks be to Jesus, is brightness. Brightness enveloping you. Brightness healing you. That, my friends, is the real miracle of Easter. Next to *that*, believing in an empty tomb is child's play.

You may be tired of big, abstract, flowery language. In which case, let us turn from St. John to St. Luke. What does it look like for lives to become brightness? For lives to be filled with the splendour of God, flowing from the crucified Jesus? Ah, thank you, St. Luke: Chapter 2, verse 42 and following: 'all who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and their goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.' Now, we may suspect Luke paints an idealised picture; we may realise that things were more complicated, but the basic point holds: lives filled with brightness equals a community of joyful generosity, of sharing, of spending much time together, of not letting people fall through the cracks, of making sure all had enough, of being wholly, emotionally, practically, heartily and quite simply financially committed to each other's flourishing, and doing it all with glad and generous hearts.

Now oddly enough we've seen quite a bit of that in how people have been looking after each other, and especially the most needy, throughout this virus crisis. It has been terrific to see that generosity, that being there for each other. There's been a lot of talk about how sad it is that the church is closed, and I do feel that, very sharply indeed. I think it is a tragedy that our church is closed, and I want to reopen it as soon as I possibly can. *But ...* the point of a church is not just to have services, or to be a place for solace and sanctuary and prayer. It *is* those things, and we desperately need them back. But those things were only ever meant to sustain a life: the life of brightness. The life of communion. The life the world

was made for, the life Jesus fills us with. And that's a life we are challenged to see and rejoice in and join in with now. The church might be closed, but the life surges on. This week, immerse yourself in it.

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