

What is the meaning of life?

Preacher

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Bible Readings

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

Sermon

“May the Words of my lips and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer.”

That prayer with which I invariably begin sermons is quite a good one, I think, to begin the series we are about to embark on. A series about both helping us to think about some deep questions and to find words to express those thoughts.

Today I'm tasked with helping you think about “The meaning of Life.” When people ask us questions about the meaning of life it is often because life itself has asked them questions.

Because they've seen a television programme which has made them think about the macro or the micro the immensity or intricacy of life. Because they have sense of being alone in the midst of life. Because of what they have encountered good or bad in Christians. Because they have been brought up short by tragedy or suffering. That being so those are the kind of questions others will be dealing with in the next four weeks so I'll try this morning not to stray on to that territory.

But how we try to answer those questions will arise out of our basic conviction about life, about what we think lies behind it all.

But, what is life?

First there is the big picture the sheer immensity and complexity of existence, of life on this planet and that will probably do us for this morning without getting into the wonders of an ever-expanding universe. But then there's our life the span of years between birth and death and questions about how that fits in with other lives - and with the bigger picture.

The conviction behind our first lesson this morning is that the big picture (all life and the means of life) is given. Also, that the one who gives is involved with the lives of those who come bearing their baskets. Why this conviction? Because a people have encountered God not merely as an idea, not merely as a concept but as a reality.

If God, the giver, is a reality for us then to explore the meaning of life is to explore the meaning of God because it is not logical to try to understand the gift apart from the giver. This is not some form of escape from the real world because to try to get deeper into what God is about leads us to get deeper into both what life is about and what the way life should be lived is about.

Jesus, we're told in our gospel reading, is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The Spirit leads him, he's full of the Holy Spirit. You might say that he was on a spiritual high - Why? Because he had just been told that he was God's Son that was what his life was about that was the meaning of his life.

So now, in the wilderness, he must work out how to go about being God's Son. How would you go about being God's Son? Where would you begin? The only place you could begin is with God because you couldn't live as God's Son any way other than God's way. That is why all the wrong ideas which Jesus has are rejected by reference to God's word. If he did that or that or that he would not be acting as God's Son.

We're not told what he decides to do because we don't have to be told that we shall see it as the story unfolds. That story is of tremendous relevance to us because we are invited to find the meaning of our lives in working out our calling to be God's children, his sons and daughters. We do that by getting close to the one who worked out what it was all about in the wilderness by saying in effect that for us Jesus is Lord"

Jesus, Paul tells us, in that short passage from Romans, comes to save us to save us from being our worst selves the kind of selves who insist on doing it their own way and set us on the path to do things God's way. He tells us too that Jesus is for everyone so to believe that Jesus is for

everyone is to find the meaning of life by ourselves living for him and living for others.

What is the meaning of life? Sometimes when we ask that question or when we're asked that question it's not easy to answer. Because both as human beings and as Christians we're conscious of how far life is from where it should be. We want to throw up our hands in perplexity or wring our hands in dismay. God actually does neither of those things. In Christ he simply holds up his hands on the cross. Christ in letting go of life for us becomes life for us and invites us to live like that. That is the only way in which ugliness can become beauty our desires and impulses can be harnessed for good.

Perhaps then the meaning of life is that it is something which we're given to grasp with both hands by letting go of it. That it is something which we can only live to the full by taking the risk of letting ourselves be completely emptied out.

If we do dare to live like that it will give a whole new meaning to life in all its senses, if enough people dare to live like that then life as we see it will reflect more and more of the one who gives it. For the more we let go, the more we refrain from living lives which are self contained the more we shall see in life the unity and the harmony which exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If you ask anyone who is not a philosopher about the meaning of life quite often they will subtly change the question and talk about what gives life meaning for them. It may be a whole range of things, family, work, art, hobbies politics whatever. When we change the question like that I guess that somewhere in the answer we have to confess that for us Jesus is Lord or if we come at it more obliquely say what a big part Church plays in our lives - taking the risk that someone will say "You don't believe in that stuff do you?"

I'll end where I began with the prayer with which I began this sermon. When we're faced with the question "What is the The meaning of life?" the answer, I think, is tied up with the one who is the meaning life the one who is our strength and our redeemer.

So: "May the words of our lips and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer."