

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

17th April 2016

John 10:10-17

Spirit... come alive in us... your creativity... your imagination... your dream... that brings us to life... and re-imagines the world in a different way... and invites us into it... revealing new possibilities and opportunities... shaped as your kingdom... So be it... Amen...

We came back from holiday last Saturday... only to find our internet connection was down... I phoned Virgin... who sent all sorts of signals down the line from somewhere in India... and decided after 20 minutes... "I'll need to call out an engineer"... "Fine" says I... "When will that be"... "First thing on Wednesday morning... They'll see what's going on and fix it"... "Thanks"...

So I put the phone down... and to make up for the lack of internet... I went to switch on the television... only to find that wasn't working either... So I went back on the phone to Virgin... who again sent another set of signals down the cable... and decided after another 20 minutes... "I'll need to call out an engineer!"... "O that's fine"... says I... "I've already got one coming out to fix the broadband"... "O no sir, it needs a different engineer for the TV"... Fair enough... "When will he or she be here"... "First thing Wednesday morning"...

So for the next four days... it was a traumatised household... We had to talk to each other... we had to read... we went to our beds earlier... until Wednesday... when only one engineer arrived... not first thing... but discovered the council had re-tarmaced the pavement outside the manse and had accidentally cut the broadband and TV cable... It was fixed in minutes...

We were a happy household once more... Life was back to normal... we could get what we wanted when we wanted it on TV... and connect with the rest of the world at any time of day or night... and buy whatever we wanted at the press of a button... life in all its abundance... was back...

Or our version of it... Except there is another version found in the Bible this morning... a line that is often fabulously misunderstood... "I have come that you may have life... and life in abundance"... says Jesus...

Often we interpret the idea of abundance as having more stuff... more friends... more facebook... more money...

But the problem with buying into that idea is that you have to first imagine you are insufficient... that you lack... that you aren't worthy... and that's how adverts work... we know the system... they create in us a sense of lack and insufficiency... which can be satisfied... by buying a particular product... as we believe him...

These last few weeks we have found it is more dangerous than that... When we seek tax havens to store our income in order to prove we are worth something... even if it is only to ourselves as it is all done in secret... then we feel we are already insufficient... or not good enough as we are... and lets face it... we all feel that at times... perhaps most of the time... I know I do...

Can we not realise paying tax actually shows us our worth in a far more valuable way by sharing in a whole society in becoming fairer and more just...

It offers an insight into a psychosis that believes we aren't sufficient as we are...

Into this let's introduce the Good Shepherd... whose promise is... "I have come that they may have life... abundantly"... But this isn't just a nice wee soundbite promise easily remembered... Jesus puts his life where his promise is... "I am the Good Shepherd and the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his friends"...

You... are... enough... In fact we are so marvellous... so fabulous... so wonderful... Jesus says to Cara and Aimee and to us... I will give up my life to show how much worth I think you have...

Yet... even the church doesn't cope well with this abundance of grace... There is a huge part of our belief structure... that says in fact... we are definitely not enough... It is our *unworthiness* that is our defining characteristic... I don't know if it is peculiarly Scottish... but we seem to take some humble pleasure in describing ourselves as God's Chief Sinner...

In fact... so strong is this feeling... we are not just undeserving of God's love... we deserve only God's wrath and punishment... and so we've grown this theology... this idea that Jesus comes to take that punishment in our place on the cross...

And if we believe in him... then we can be forgiven... Something Jesus does... atones for our sin... and makes us worthy in God's eyes... We even sing songs that have the line... And on that cross as Jesus died... the wrath of God was satisfied...

I have never understood this... Can anyone figure out why... if God loves us... God has to punish Jesus in our place... Why does Jesus need to atone for sin... Why do the scales of heaven's justice... have to be balanced through violence... And is there any real forgiveness in the idea that Jesus has to be executed... for God to forgive us and find us acceptable?... What kind of primitive human sacrificial system are we maintaining there... to appease the gods...

Either we believe Jesus... comes in order to make it possible for God to love us... that's the appeasing God's wrath scenario... or Jesus... the Good Shepherd comes *because* God already loves us... that we are already enough... to be loved fully by God...

That doesn't mean we are perfect... you can be enough to be loved... be given dignity... respect... forgiveness... without being perfect... God doesn't mention perfection...

Who here with children can name one that is perfect?... None of them... But which one is worthy of our love... Exactly... all of them...

So it is a huge mistake... to have as the main image in our belief... that Jesus takes our place and bears the punishment that should be ours because we are unworthy... Jesus doesn't come to make us worthy of love...

Because God already loves us... we are already enough...

In fact... everything Jesus does... says there is nothing you can do to stop me loving you... for you I will lay down my life... There is no equation of sin being balanced out by Jesus being punished for us by a God who is full of wrath...

The Good Shepherd says... you are worthy enough already... you are loved enough already... you are so sufficient to me... that there is nothing you do... and there is nothing the world can do... to stop me loving you...

When we think of God... do we imagine God primarily as a kind of cosmic bureaucrat that expects nothing other than to balance the scales of justice with violence...

Or more of a loving parent who will do just about anything... even die... to show how much we are loved...

We need to start our relationship with God... believing we are enough... enough for the Good Shepherd to say... I love you enough that I am willing to die to show you just how much I love you... God says to Jesus... I will not stop loving them even if it means you are killed by them... And Jesus got himself killed by humanity... and even that couldn't stop God loving us... We are enough...

Tax havens and schemes... do the opposite... *You* lay down *your* life for them... because you get trapped into believing you are never worth enough... Not with Jesus... He turns the coin over and says... *You are* enough...

When we believe that... that we are sufficient... enough for God to love us fully already... then we know what life in its fullness... living in abundance... really means...

References

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