

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany - 2017

I went to the Tidbinbilla Deep Space tracking station a week or so ago and while I was there I watched a documentary on the Juno space probe to Jupiter. It was very good, but at one point the narrator said that in discovering all about Jupiter we will be able to discover something of the meaning of human life on earth. I had to disagree with him at that point, science can indeed discover how we have arrived, but why we are here is the realm of the philosopher and theologian! At the intersection of philosophy and theology lies one question: *Why* do we exist? *Why* are we here, what is it all about? What is the meaning of life. Those of you who were fans of the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy would know that ‘Deep Thought’ the greatest computer ever created took seven and a half million years to work out that the meaning of life the universe and everything is 42. But I’ve got a hunch that there is a little more to it than that. In days gone by the Catechism stated that the meaning of life was, ‘to know God, to love God, and to serve God in this world, and to be happy with God forever in the next.’ This could be the key to the Beatitudes and particularly the sixth – Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’

To see God was, for the people of Biblical times, a terrible thing. Remember on the Mount of Transfiguration the disciples, when the voice comes from the cloud, fall to ground and are overcome with fear. To see God is to die. In the Book of Exodus Moses is warned ‘But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live.’ But later we read that Moses indeed ‘spoke to God and saw him face to face as a friend.’ He was not the first, after Jacob wrestled with God in Genesis we read: ‘I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.’ We too wrestle with the idea of both ‘God with us’ in the person of Emmanuel and yet also the other, the God *beyond* the created order. RS Thomas the famously grumpy Welsh poet and priest wrote: ‘Face to face? Ah no God; such language falsifies the relation. Nor side by side, nor near you, nor anywhere in time and space.’ So where do we begin to understand this? I believe we consider this question by asking ourselves why are we here this morning? What are we doing? To understand what we are doing here helps us to understand the meaning of life!

We are here to hold a mirror up to God, to who God is and what God is. We are most truly ourselves in the imaging of God, we are ourselves fully when we reflect God, to God. So we may be fully human in God’s purpose in our love for the world, in the love drawn out of us by God’s grace, in our relationships with each other, but we shall not be fully human if our love for the world and each other is all there is. We could do that anywhere, join a service club, give to a charity whatever. We are fully human in the contemplation of God’s eternal mystery and the joy that comes with that. So the meaning of life is worship!! We are made to worship! That is our destiny, our joy and fruition! If our failures in love to one another, our care for creation stem from anything they ultimately stem

from our unwillingness to worship. The first sin, as Adam discovered, our unwillingness to worship, our desire to be a god!

The problem then of course that we can't, hold up a mirror to God, not a good one anyway. Paul says for now 'we see in a mirror dimly, but we will see face to face.' Our mirror is dim because our worship is never without distraction, not completely, our relationship with God is always clouded by other things, by our own desires, what *we* want to do, perhaps even now we are thinking what we going to do this afternoon! We don't always want to pray. Our reflection back is always incomplete! I'm sure you've heard the story of the chap who didn't want to go to church, his mother kept on at him get up, get up! I don't want to go to church, he complained! But you've got to.... you're the Bishop of the Diocese! We don't always want to worship. But the situation is not hopeless and this is the cause of our joy.

At inter faith gatherings we can pray together with our Muslim and Jewish cousins. But strictly speaking Christian prayer is always offered 'through Christ.' Notice that the Collects always have that ending; in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns etc, that is what makes them Christian prayers. So we always pray through Christ, the person who most perfectly reflects humanity back to God. As the great Philippians hymn says Jesus, the new Adam, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, he let go! We too let go, this is why coming to church is such a joy, we *are not* overcome with fear or that dreadful self-loathing of days gone by. This why coming to church is crucial to being Christian; some of you commented on my recent pew sheet musings about speaking to those who stay away but tell me they can pray on the golf course or the garden or that coming to church doesn't make them a better person, I hear it all. None of this is completely inaccurate but what makes us Christians is that we pray *through* Christ, *in* the spirit, because we are most human, most ourselves when we gather as the Body of Christ, made whole, forgiven, redeemed, nourished, it is then we are able most fully to reflect back to God the glory that belongs only to God.

So what are called to do? We are called to worship; this is why we are here, this is our purpose. It is in worship together that we reflect God, back to God. Refusal to worship is sinfulness, we are alienating ourselves from God. Hence the sixth beatitude; 'Blessed at the pure in heart for they shall see God.' Each of beatitudes is about acknowledging that fullness of life comes with acknowledging our dependence upon God. Again we most fully do this in worship and in worship we strive to be pure in heart, our hearts are softened, we are most profoundly one and we are anticipating our destiny - to see God.

'Blessed at the pure in heart for they shall see God.' Amen.