

Jesus and All the Things of Life Gen 18:16-33; 2 Pet 2:4-10; Matt 28:18-20

Sermon part1: Introduction

An interesting exchange happened at our recent Church Council meeting. Someone suggested that we meet every two months rather than monthly, so parishioners would have more to discuss with us about church matters after the Sunday service. The consensus seemed to be that such dialogue wouldn't happen. I believe that what people speak about after church is a vital indication of how real Jesus is to them in everyday life. Dale exhorted us last week to speak the gospel to each other (Col 3:16) and he has repeatedly quoted Ephesians 4:10, one the most strategic verses of my spiritual history, "He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might *fill all things*.)". The New Living Translation has, "the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself." This is an extraordinary and exciting *perspective on everything*. Let me summarise how an encounter with the ascended Lord radically changed the direction of my life and ministry.

Seeing All is for Jesus

At the end of 7 days of 12 hours of prayer and fasting in 1994, I felt I was under huge spiritual opposition, but prostrate and clinging to the carpet so I could keep praying I suddenly had a clear insight into the heavenly Jesus doing what it says in Acts 3:21, bringing the "restoration of *all things*, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets." I could see the Lord restoring God's order into politics, business, arts, law, justice, education etc. This revelation turned my mind from a narrow Church-centred vision to a Christ-centred vision for the transformation of all life and culture. As Paul says about Jesus in Colossians, "*all things* have been created through him and for him" (Col 1:16 cf. Matt 11:27). Soon after this experience I discovered that many others saw things this way. One outstanding example is a quote from the theologian and one-time Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!". How might we at St Marks join in the mission of Jesus in reclaiming all things for himself?

The Energy of Agony

Our Old and New Testament readings contain a thread which should shake us out of our spiritual sleepiness (Eph 5:14; Rev 3:2) about the world around us. What do Noah "a herald of righteousness" (2 Pet 2:5), Abraham, pleading repeatedly for the Lord to spare Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16-33) and the "righteous Lot" (2 Pet 2:7) have in common? They all found themselves surrounded by wickedness that tormented their righteous souls day after day (2 Pet 2:8). Each of them, by life, word and deeds set forth a vision of God's righteousness which alone could deliver the wicked from the fate of coming judgment (2 Pet 2:4, 9). Each of them was so inwardly stirred up by the distance between the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of the world that they were *constrained* to pray and to proclaim the ways of the Lord (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). Their passion for the lost was in fact a prophetic foretaste of the saving energy that flows from the agony of the cross.

When we have a revelation that all things were created for Jesus sense something of the grief of the Spirit when they lose their God-appointed purpose. The world of nature was created to bring glory to Jesus (Pss 8; 104; Heb 2:6-9), as was sexuality (Gen 1:26-28), marriage (Eph

5:32), family, race (Rev 7:9) and work (Gen 2:15). So when year after year the Spirit of the Lord witnesses an invasion of ungodliness (Rom 1:18-32) into each of these spheres he is deeply grieved (Eph 4:30). As we should be.

These things are very much on my mind as late afternoon on Monday I had two phone calls in succession. The first from a brother in Christ as to whether he should contest his wife's divorce petition in court and fight it out for the next few years. The second from a sister in the Lord who lives in constant fear of her "Christian" husband in a domestic violence situation. All pastors know there is strife in many Christian families and that *many believing husbands and wives do not pray together regularly*. This is a recipe for the sort of social disintegration we are witnessing all around us. Hosts of believers simply have no idea how to respond biblically to huge issues like the COVID19 crisis and Black Lives Matter. We have largely lost our manifest identity (Eph 3:10), in being, to quote Paul, "the church of the living God, a pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Tim 3:15). Having lost touch with God's griefs over the state of the world we fail to experience the energy for the transformation of creation that comes from sharing in the cross as the springboard for resurrection!

Sermon part 2: Discipling Nations

The Great Commission ending the Gospel of Matthew (28:18-20) is well known. There are however two vital aspects of this final command of Jesus which are often overlooked. Jesus commanded us "make disciples of all *nations*", not all individuals but all nations or "people groups". This is far vaster than bringing a message of forgiveness so people can get to heaven, it is a call to totally obey Jesus in every realm of life (Matt 28:20). This certainly includes Jesus being Lord of the workplace, and it's why I am a part of a team poised to launch a marketplace mentoring network across Perth. A vision for every believer who desires to grow up into full Christlikeness in their vocation to be disciplined by a more mature fellow Christian. For too long there has been a Sunday/Monday divide, epitomised by this quote from a former CEO of McDonalds, "On Sunday I believe in God, family and McDonald's – and in the office the order is reversed." (Ray Kroc).

When Jesus presented his life to the Father on the cross he presented everything that he had ever been and done (recapitulated): his infancy, childhood, youth and adulthood, his vocation as a carpenter and prophet, priest and king were all yielded to the Father for us. Not only were our sins in every dimension of life put to death on the cross but every space of human existence was glorified in resurrection. Through Jesus there is no longer a sacred/secular divide, no longer a separation between parts of human existence that are holy, like coming to Church, and parts from which the Lord is absent, like work. Jesus promised his presence everywhere when he said, "behold, *I am with you* always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20).

This glorious promise ends a Gospel which started with, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, *God with us*)." (Matt 1:21). Jesus is just as much with us in the workplace, in the sporting sphere (you know there are Bible studies in a number of AFL clubs) and in every place we live, move and have our being as he was present to humanity enclosed in the womb of Mary.

How then is it possible for Christian people to talk together, about anything, from family to finances to football, without understanding that Jesus is with us in the conversation (Matt

18:20) desiring to minister to us by his Word and lead us, usually in prayer, through wisdom, power and guidance?

St Marks aside, the limits that the Church places on the Lordship of Christ over “all things” are almost everywhere disastrous. The Jesus that has been presented through the teaching of scripture has often been far smaller than the real Jesus through whom and for whom the whole universe was created. This cosmic Lord has come to live in you, of whom Paul says, “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), this is the Jesus who longs to pour out his Spirit to bring back to himself every straying sphere of life and culture (cf. Eph 2:13, 17) for the glory of God.

We must confess today that in relation to our marriages, families, churches, workplaces and nations, that our Jesus has been far too small. Remember that part of Ephesians Dale has regularly quoted, ““I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be *filled with all the fullness of God.*”” (Eph 3:14-19). I know someone who memorised this as a young Christian and prayed it daily; little wonder God elevated him to the second highest court in the land. This petition of Paul is outstanding, but we are liable for the sin James describes, “You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your pleasures” (4:2-3).

Conclusion

God our Father-Creator, Jesus our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit the Completer are deeply INTERESTED in all the things of life, as INTERESTED as the blood of the cross which has reconciled “all things” to God (Col 1:20). *Which is why* the word, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” is fully true. Have you yielded “every square inch” to the Lordship of Christ: I see couples praying in bedrooms, I hear praises in kitchens, I witness bank balances handed over to God, families as hubs of devotion, I hear folk speaking in tongues in the shower, TV times cut down for prolonged intercession, and workplaces as mission fields. When we hand back to Jesus the ownership of all things, the miracle of everyday Christian people, even Anglicans, bringing into “ordinary conversation” the name of Jesus will take place. All things must be brought into subjection to our Lord. It’s time to get out of our St Marks bubble and step with Christ in prayer and mission into discipling “all nations”.