

A NEW SERIES

Lord of all or not at all - developing a holistic spirituality

Part 1 - 'Comfortable Impostors' 15th April 2007

If the message we joyfully proclaimed and sang about last Sunday is true every Sunday should be Easter! Life can never be the same again! Everything is changed! Jesus has overcome death and sin. He has opened up the way to God and glory. He is alive! And we can have that relationship with God for which we were created. As the stone is rolled away, it opens up another world for us.

We will never be whole and complete until we find our identity in our relationship with him. 17th century philosopher Blaise Pascal - *"all men seek happiness. This is without exception. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."*

People turn to the wrong things in their pursuit of happiness possessions, popularity, position or power and they miss the meaning of life. We were not meant to find our purpose and meaning in shopping, home-improvements, football, holidays or even our families. When we follow the way of the world, seeking meaning through what we achieve and own, we only find disappointment and dissatisfaction.

Macbeth's despairing conclusion is that *life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*. That is the logical conclusion of life without God. Most people don't get there. They prefer to live unexamined lives and avoid the ultimate questions. We have become masters at avoidance, entertainment and escape.

Pascal: *There once was in man a true happiness of which now remains to him only the dark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundingsbut these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and (immutable) unchangeable object, that is to say, only by God himself.*

Augustine: *You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.* The ultimate reality is an infinite and personal God who created everything and offers us the priceless privilege of an endless relationship with him. And that is why something in all of us, however much we may try to suppress it, longs for more than this world can offer.

Then one day we are mending our nets, or more likely doing the ironing or sitting in front of a computer, and we hear the call of the risen Jesus. Jesus is calling us to follow him and become his disciples. He is still enrolling students in the 'Master Class of Life'. He is inviting us to discover the life of his kingdom, to become followers of the Way.

As we begin to follow Jesus we become pilgrims in this world. We realise that our true citizenship is in the heavenly realm. We become aware of the tensions caused by still living in the world. We begin to lose our way in an alluring and deceptive world. We begin to play by two sets of rules. We try to have it both ways – the world's and God's.

We end up living fragmented lives in a fragmented world and it is painful! Choice become an idol we worship reducing obligations to options. Our focus becomes blurred and our commitment is diminished. We lose our sense of identity as the people who are called to follow and serve Christ. We forget our call to radical commitment to Jesus. Our relationship to Jesus becomes an add-on, a take-it or leave-it option in life.

The process of revising the Electoral Roll is always a painful exercise, reminding us as it does of those who have drifted or turned away from Christ. Sadly, there will always be those who begin to follow, and then for various reasons turn away.

John records a moment when many of Jesus' disciples deserted him.

Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you going to leave, too?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life.
John 6:67-68

Peter understood that without Christ there were no other options. But do we? There is nowhere else to turn. That is something each of us must come to admit. When we turn to Christ, we lay hold of the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star, the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end, the firstborn from the dead, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the ultimate source of true meaning and significance.

What other goal could we set our hearts on, other than knowing and loving and serving this wonderful Saviour and Lord? What other goals indeed! The truth is that we are not willing to settle only for one goal. And so we resolve this tension by compartmentalising our lives. We find life easier to manage if we put everything into compartments - family, work, leisure, finances and our relationship with Jesus. We compartmentalise our faith and divorce it from other aspects of life. We end up thinking that some compartments are secular and others are spiritual.

The *spiritual* becomes certain things like going to church or cell or having a quiet time. We imagine that the more we do these things the more spiritual we are. This leads to disparities between belief and behaviour. We claim to follow Christ but we are not becoming more like him. St Ambrose wrote, '*You are a sort of impostor when your profession and practice disagree.*' Yes, we become comfortable impostors with an amazing ability to overlook the inconsistencies in our lives. The truth is that far from being salt and light, we often cannot be distinguished from anyone else when it comes to the way we relate, our conduct at work, problems in the home, handling finances, addictions etc.

If we want to live whole, integrated lives that honour God there must be a connection between faith and living, between belief and character, between profession and practice. The spiritual life is not limited to church services, personal devotions, cell meetings and life groups. The spiritual life is nourished by these things. How we spend our money is as much a matter of the spiritual life as how we say our prayers.

Everything depends on the focus of the heart. Walt Henrichsen – '*The secular becomes spiritual when the focus of one's heart is the eternal.*' What appears to be a secular job, whether in a factory, school or law firm, becomes a spiritual pursuit if the focus of the worker's heart is on God's kingdom and righteousness. What matters in the economy of God is not the nature of the work but the focus of the heart.

Almost anything and everything can be done to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31 ***Whatever you do, you must do all for the glory of God.*** The reality of our faith is demonstrated more in the way we walk with Jesus in the mundane than in the number of meetings we attend. The most authentic expression of our desire to serve and glorify God will be in the ordinary activities of life. Whatever that activity, and we do spend most of our lives in the realms of detail and drudgery, we realise that apart from Jesus we can do nothing of

eternal value and we can bear no lasting fruit. But as we abide in him, we can discover splendour and glory in the ordinary. That's the difference the resurrection makes! The life of discipleship is one of obedience and faithfulness in the mundane. All followers of Christ are called to full-time Christian service. We were never meant to be compartmentalised, part-time disciples. The life of the kingdom is sacramental in that it unifies the secular and the sacred, the natural and the spiritual, into a seamless whole.

True discipleship requires a new orientation of the whole of our lives around the kingdom rule of Christ. A life centred on him will cost us everything.

Luke 14:26-27,33 ***"If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And you cannot be my disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow me. So no one can become my disciple without giving up everything for me."***

Everything – family, friends, careers, must be given over to him without reservation.

A true disciple will be single-minded in his pursuit of Jesus, set apart for his service and surrendered to his purpose. He will allow himself to be possessed by God. The Holy Spirit is free to re-orientate our hearts, values and behaviours. Our highest calling is to know God in a deeper and richer way.

That was Paul's ambition – ***that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death.*** Phil 3:10

This conformity is vividly described in Galatians 2:20 ***I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*** Christ wasn't a component but the whole of his life. He summarized the direction and destiny of his life in one sentence. ***For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*** Phil 1:21 Paul had this single-mindedness – his longing for growth in the experiential knowledge of the person and power of the risen Christ.

Philip. 3:12 ***I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be.***

Paul was never satisfied with the status quo in his walk with God. The overwhelming passion of his life was to know and be like Jesus. Paul was not yet perfect but he was single-minded. I am certainly not perfect and I am not even single-minded. But I want to be! However far away we may be, let's ask God to create a desire..... that I may want to want to want to be single-minded and live an integrated life with Christ at the centre.