

Being Fully Alive – Rev'd Hans Christiansen – Sunday 3rd May 2009

Readings: John 10.10-18, Psalm 23, 1 John 3.16- 24, John 10. 11-18

Today in the gospel we hear Jesus expressing the ultimate reason for why He came and what he does for his followers. He says, *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”*.

This beautiful sentiment is echoed in a fourth century Eucharistic prayer that expresses the heart of what the faith of the early Christians meant to them: It reads,
We entreat you, God, make us truly alive.

We all long to be truly alive! But we are not always sure what being truly alive means, are we? It seems we all spend much of our lives searching for what it means to be truly alive! Perhaps we think success in our career can make us truly alive? Perhaps we think the family can make us truly alive? Perhaps we think wealth will make us truly alive?

But while some degree of all this is important to most people, it is never going to satisfy our deepest desire to be truly alive.

At some point or another in all people's lives there comes a time, when we grow restless and discontented with life, as it seems. Most often this seems to occur mid-way through life, but it can come at any time and it keeps occurring if we don't listen to it. Often this restlessness is perceived to be a mild form of depression or lack of interest in life.

But often this restlessness, this lack of enthusiasm, this discontentment, is not an illness but rather a divine spark within us, urging us to search for a deeper meaning and presence in life. This restlessness or mild depression can be a holy restlessness, an urge, a spark, a divine presence, which is not content with us just going along with life.

Often we try to silence the restlessness within with medical treatment, with alcohol, or with buying a new car or boat or something else, and often we make major changes like getting divorced or moving – all in search for that which can make us truly feel alive.

But whatever we buy or break, we only scratch the surface, the feeling inside never fully leaves us, it always keeps on beating inside of us. Like we hear in the Revelation of St John Chapter 3, the Risen Christ always whispers inside of us:

“Listen! I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come to you and eat with you, and you with me”.

Let me illustrate this with an example:

The other day I listened to a talk given by a major business and finance executive who is responsible for a great deal of the fiscal policy for the government of Singapore. Even though he was incredibly successful and still is, he said that around the time of his midlife he began to feel restless. He was longing for more depth and meaning in life than what family and career could give him. Together with his wife, he opened the door of his heart and began to practise Christian meditation twice daily, which led him, as he himself describes, to a deeper fullness of life and a more purposeful existence. He began to be truly alive.

He didn't end his career; he didn't join a monastery as some people do. He continued on in the business world very successfully but with a renewed sense that he was a servant for humanity and that what he was doing was to benefit others. His life changed in so far as he became less aggressive and fearful. He became less concerned about climbing to the top of the corporate ladder and more concerned with spending time with God, his family and friends as well as working to serve humanity.

Perhaps this story echoes something of your own story. Perhaps you too have been restless and discontented? Perhaps you are right now? Perhaps you too are longing to be fully alive!

The biggest obstacle to be fully alive, I think, is fear.

That's why the Bible keeps repeating the dictum: 'do not fear'.

Fear cripples us. Fear twists our mind and turns us away from each other, away from God, away from goodness, compassion and love and ultimately away from being truly alive, which is what we are made for.

There is so much fear in our world today, especially if we follow the ever-changing tides of the media, which seems to feed on fear. One week it is the global recession. Next week it is the climate change. Next week it is the threat of nuclear-armed terrorists taking control in Pakistan. Next week it is swine flu! While all these things are real and are to be addressed, what do they actually do to us? They make us fearful and despondent! And most often we don't do anything about it anyway.

Listen to my voice inside you, Jesus says in today's texts: I am the good shepherd who lays down my life for you and leads you into fullness of life. I have come to cast away fear and make you fully alive; to lead you from fear to freedom, from hatred to love, and from despair into hope - to the still waters, where your soul will be restored. There at the depth of your being, the darkest of times cannot shake you for you know that I am with you and you with me.

Loving oneself and loving one another is Jesus most essential teaching on how to be truly alive. Love casts out fear. As we heard before in John's letter: "*Let us love, not only in word and speech, but in truth and action.*"

Sometimes it takes just a little step to change direction in life so as to become more alive and more compassionate and happy.

Don't listen to the first negative thoughts that enter your consciousness in the morning. Take hold of the positive thoughts.

Spend time with God in silence morning and evening.

Savour each moment as a tremendous gift from God; every act of living can become a moment of fully living: breathing, eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, crying, laughing, feeling tired, feeling fresh – all of it is to be lived fully with an awareness of God's presence, who like a shepherd, always longs to lead us to happiness and abundant life.

We entreat you, God, make us fully alive. **Amen.**

Hans Christiansen