

Our Deepest Desire
Job 28:1-11; Acts 14:8-17
Mattins 7th February 2010

What is your deepest desire? There are many very good answers to this question- the health and happiness of one's nearest and dearest I have often heard people say matters most to them. Making a positive contribution to the world is another; feeling that we have done something worthwhile with the gift of our life- have been able to alleviate suffering or help others. But underneath all these altruistic and sometimes not so altruistic desires lies a deeper, often unacknowledged desire- the desire for God.

St Augustine famously said: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.'

There is a deep yearning in us human beings, a longing which nothing in this world can satisfy- a God-shaped gap that only God can fill.

Unfortunately, more often than not we don't recognise that God is the goal of our deepest yearnings. Human beings are made to desire – St Anselm prayed- Lord, give me what you have made me want.' But history shows us that from the very beginning we have spurned our deepest desire and calling and filled the gap with

our lesser desires. We will strive to the limits of our endurance to mine the earth for the precious metals hidden there, we will encounter risk and danger for the sake of gold, to uncover the great resources of the natural world and harness them to our use; we will travel to the moon to increase our understanding and control of the universe we live in- and yet true Wisdom, the wisdom of God, eludes our grasp.

Maybe this is because we rely too heavily on gaining intellectual understanding and rational control. Of course, reason and intellect are also God given human capacities which we are meant to use, gifts which reflect God himself. William Blake's famous image, 'the Ancient of Days, created in 1794, shows God with a measuring instrument in his hand- God imposing order, taking something formless and shaping it into something structured. The imagery has its origins in the Book of Job, where at the end God offers Job a panoramic view of the created order, in all its immensity and puzzling grandeur. And yet Blake's famous image also conveys another message-he was critical of an excessively rational approach, fearing that too much reliance on reason might be to the detriment of the life of the imagination. Nature, the creation, cannot be seen in purely mechanical terms- what about beauty, spirituality, the sense of something other and greater than ourselves?

Of course we like to have everything weighed and measured and categorized- we feel more comfortable and in control that way. But reality is actually way beyond what we can measure. We get a bit closer to the Wisdom which Job is probing and searching for when we are able to accept that we don't and can't know everything- we aren't God-when we can live comfortably with mystery without craving certainty and feeling we have to find a factual answer to everything.

That sort of acceptance has of course been sorely tested recently. It can be very hard to hold onto faith in the light of Haiti, the light- or more appropriately the darkness- of the Holocaust, the suffering in the Sudan- and so many more examples...

But when terrible events happen we also witness shining acts of love and compassion- we see humanity at its best, full of courage and hope. The Anne Frank exhibition is a fine example of this, as are the many stories of heroism emerging from Haiti. Here are examples of people who know that we are all in this together, that we are not isolated individuals but completely interdependent with the whole great created universe, pulsing with life and energy. That we are in fact made in the image of God for whom mutual, loving relationship with everything created is of the utmost importance.

Empathy and imagination are at the heart of what it means to be whole human beings. I take it that that is what the stories of healings in Jesus's ministry and by his disciples after the resurrection are signifying. Our healing in the deepest sense is not only bodily but a spiritual and moral healing, healing that opens us up rather than closing us in. Paul looks at the crippled man and sees that there is potential for healing. We need to see beyond what is factually in front of our eyes to the deeper truth within.

If we accept God as the ultimate source and then look at the world through that lens then our perceptions are transformed. Some 150 years before Blake George Herbert wrote the Elixir:

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espie.

We can either just see the darkness and the suffering or we can see God loving and caring for his creation, in relationship and connection with all things. It is not an explanation, it is a way of being, in which we learn the power of imagination, to see with the inner eye beyond the outward appearance of things.

'Do you believe in God? Asked Fynn.
'Yes', said six-year-old Anna.
'What is God then?'

'He is God!...
You see, Fynn, everybody has got a point of view,
But Mister God hasn't. Mister God has only points to
view.'
Fynn puzzled over this for some time,
Before he realised what Anna was saying:
Humanity has an infinite number of points of view,
But God has an infinite number of viewing points;
That means that- God is everywhere!...
Anna had taken the whole idea of God
Outside the limitation of time and
Placed him firmly in the realm of eternity.

(Mister God this is Anna, by Fynn. Sydney Hopkin)

If we don't find God in all the experiences, joys,
tragedies and confusions of this life that is because our
concept of God is too small. We must deepen and
widen our search for wisdom, and unlock our
imaginations. Of course imagination itself is a powerful
gift which can be used positively or negatively. When we
succumb to false desires and push reason out altogether
then we easily get to the situation Paul and Barnabas
found themselves in; the people saw only that something
astonishing had happened and assumed the disciples
were gods who needed sacrifices to propitiate them.
Paul directed their false perceptions to understand that
the true God has revealed himself in the created world.
Back to George Herbert- we look through the world to

see God himself, God at work in his universe, healing,
restoring, transforming.

Without God our desires go all awry. We want the wrong
things, we turn to exploitative or defensive behaviour
which can never bring satisfaction- God alone can
satisfy our deepest yearnings. Our questions, searching,
logical reasoning are human and necessary, but need
to be held together with wonder, respect and awe at
the evidences we are given, if we will only see, of God
present and with is always.

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