

Isolation Radio Talk

Unwise to receive; foolish to fear. What?

Good Morning

Jesus said 'love one another'; so simple to say; so complicated to live. The bible is so full of stories and people who trip over the command to love. It comes as a surprise and a joy to hear St Paul praise the Church in Corinth, commend it for its generosity, richness in faith, speech, knowledge, and diligence of every kind and, as well, 'the love you have for us' (2 Cor 8.7). Earlier, in the same letter, St Paul gives a comprehensive list of how Christians should be with each other, with the people around them. It seems true, all these years on, that we find it difficult to follow the Corinthians example.

Examples today are observed at the beginning and at the end of human life. What is the loving thing to do? What is the Christ-like thing to do? When is the moment to say enough is enough and to let a person die in peace? When should the striving to keep alive give place to the contentment of 'let be'? Should the foetus or the unborn child be aborted for the sake of the mother, or the family, or the child?

Our generation has looked at in-vitro fertilisation, surrogate motherhood, cryo-preservation, spare embryos, ovum donation, genetic screening, gene therapy, sex selection. Not an exhaustive list but pointing to the possibilities of genetic engineering; children born today may live to be 150; or be designed to suit a whim. All this in a world where two thirds already do not have enough to eat; where we must live with COVID-19, disease, starvation; where there seems no end to corruption or the cruelty inflicted on the poorest of the poor; and where dramatic changes in our climate has the potential to cause humanities extinction.

Small wonder you receive the news of the many discoveries with unease; Christians along with others must measure the issues in the face of what humankind has done with our world. You must discover whether the purposes of a loving God permit the exercise of such knowledge. You will be unwise if you expect all Christians to agree; let me suggest some things to take your thinking forward.

I wonder if nature is set with limits; or is the world journeying still towards a yet unrealised goal? I ask about the relationship of nature to God's purpose. Is the story in Genesis about God who sets limits on what humankind should touch; or is there freedom to continue exploring the tree of knowledge and the tree of good and evil? The increase in knowledge seems no guarantee of an increase in wisdom. Is nature neutral? If so, are there limits to human responsibility? Is the option to say no, any option at all?

Some will welcome and accept new knowledge. They are companions on a journey that began with creation itself; the end is the hope of eternal life given us by Christ. The Christian's task is to accept each new responsibility as a gift, God given. Knowledge and its results are part of God's gift, God's creation; it is good.

Others will reflect that boundaries have been pushed so far that you lose touch with God's loving purpose. Humankind does not have the maturity or the moral sense to handle the power released, they say; there are limits; you are the steward, not the master of the natural order; eat from the tree of knowledge and ignore the tree of good and evil at your peril.

Many will oscillate between the two, looking for boundaries and theological principles to inform thinking. You can begin by observing that it is a sad sight to see the self-made person worshipping their creator. The Christian faith says, God created the universe for a purpose; its laws give both limits and clues to that purpose. 'The heavens are telling the glory of God' (Psalm 19.1), says a psalm.

It seems important then to see the world and its life under the sovereignty of God. There is order and structure in nature; its integrity must be protected; you conclude you are not free to do as you please. This is as true of the prairies of central America; the rain forests; or the chemical plants of Europe and Asia, as it is of human genetics. There is good to be aimed for and this good is the essence of nature as destined by God. Simply to exercise domination of matter for profit, or for power, or for its own sake, cannot be what the bible means when the creation myths of Genesis say God gave humankind 'dominion' over all the earth (Genesis 1.28). Dominion is one thing domination is another.

If humankind is given dominion by God, it is also given responsibility. You are to be stewards and trustees, not owners. This religious insight must be heard where decisions are made; you may not avoid that responsibility; your voice must be heard; the times are urgent

The woman and man of faith will understand that God's purpose for Creation is not yet complete. St Paul's picturesque language is helpful, if obscure, when he writes about the 'whole creation has been groaning in labour pains' - with all the overtones of childbirth- 'until now' (Romans 8.22). You will be unwise to receive all scientific discovery as the will of God and yet you will be foolish to fear new things and place them outside the providential care of our heavenly Father.

Transformation is what the Kingdom of God is about. Christian teaching is about death and resurrection; it is not about abandoning and replacing. The same world God created will be redeemed and glorified. The good once given will be taken and renewed: that is the hope; that is the sure and certain hope of the Christian story being told.

The focus is again on Jesus Christ. Here is St. Paul; God 'has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ' (Ephesians 1.9). You must watch Christ and learn from him the value and the dignity of human life, because it is of God.

Christians will turn away from quick and often easy moral judgements; those come from misunderstanding or over-simplistic understanding or, still worse, deep prejudice. There is a not altogether good history of Christian response to change and new understanding. Therefore, in making judgements, be sensitive, tread carefully. Above all reflect on that better way which is love. Love is God's gift; it will reflect God. Love is the way; perhaps the only way.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Let us pray to the one God,
Mother/Father, Word and Spirit,
that our lives may bear witness
to our love and hope in God.

Lord, love is all we need.
Help us to do better
in our thoughts, words and deeds;
to love as you love us.
Amen.