

"Saying Yes to God"

Philosophers make it their business to reflect on deep questions. One of the deepest and hardest questions to answer is, "What is the meaning of life?" How are you doing with that one? Have you figured it out? What is the meaning of life? If you've got the answer can we do a phone call or a Zoom meeting sometime soon, because I'd like to know? We'd all like to know. Philosophy is good at dealing with hard questions by asking other questions. Maybe we can get to the meaning of life by tackling a sublayer of deep questions like, "Where have we come from? Why are we here? And where are we going when we leave this world?" When we're at this level we can see how our Christian faith connects and provides a helpful context. The lessons of our faith tell us that in the beginning, God created all things. And so, to the question, "Where have we come from?" we come from God. It follows then that we are here, given life on this earth, to be in relationship with God. Our faith tells us we are in this world to praise God and to serve, and to receive the blessings of God. And then, as to the question of where do we go from here when our time on this earth is done, the response of our faith is that we go to be with the one who was there in the beginning. In the context of our faith, we believe there is more to this life than just this world. It's not a "one and done" for us. We go to be with God. The words of the early church say it beautifully when we read in the book of 2 Corinthians, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 cor. 5:1) Now, all of this may be a little too cerebral for our worship today. To be honest, reflecting on the meaning of life and even reflecting on the deeper theological truths of our faith can make our minds and our attention grow fuzzy. Sure, it's OK to go deep but we can't stay in a zoned out, reflective state of mind for long. We've got a life to live. Most days we just have to get on with it. We've got responsibilities and things to do. Maybe the most important question in life isn't some philosophy that's too deep to grasp. Maybe the most important question is much more practical and down-to-earth.

Years ago I was in a conversation with another preacher who was a mentor for me and we were talking about these very matters. He said that he had learned the most important question to get at the heart of life's meaning is this one, "What will I do to fill up the time?" There, that's it. Could it be that simple? Is it possible to discover the meaning of our lives by answering the question "What are we going to do to fill up the time?" The fact is we answer that question every day. We make decisions about where we will place our commitments and our energy. We have schedules and calendars that fill up the hours of the day. And, when we have time to fill, we make decisions on how we will use that time? How we fill up the time is a good indicator of what meaning there is in our lives and this is another place where our faith gives a helpful context. Our relationship with God connects with our decisions about how we fill the time. Jesus didn't say it exactly that way but this is what he meant when he taught about the Kingdom of God. His entire mission was to make known what he called the Kingdom of God, what Matthew's gospel calls the Kingdom of Heaven. There's a reality, Jesus taught, that is all around us, a reality filled with God's influence and presence. The decisions we make about the use of our time reflects the depth to which we are aware of this God kingdom. And here's the thing, Jesus doesn't hope we will sense the reality of the kingdom just in an experience of worship. Jesus wants us to step into the kingdom reality so that we are immersed in it, wrapped in it where we are, and aware of it in all of the ways we fill up the time.

This was on Jesus' mind the day he told the story of the wedding banquet. A son of a certain king was to be married and a wedding feast was planned. Everything was ready but none of those who were invited showed up. We've had weddings in my family and I'm sure you have, too. Can you imagine doing all the planning, and deciding all of the logistics and the details of celebration, and when it's the day of the party no one comes? I urge us to refrain from interpreting this story in the traditional way, where we say the king represents God and the son represents Jesus and the guests are the Jewish and Gentile communities of the first century. Let's not lose the point that Jesus is showing us what the Kingdom of God is like, and what he's saying is that a key component to experiencing the kingdom is knowing that God is in the invitation business. Living in the reality of the kingdom is receiving the invitation of God to participate in a life that is joy filled, a life that celebrates love, a life where we are invited to be at the table to enjoy what God has prepared for us. In the story, everyone was too busy. Their calendars were full. Their commitments didn't leave room for a party. Jesus knows that the meaning of our lives is largely determined by how we fill up the time. He wants us to respond to God's invitation to come and to be a part of what God is doing in our lives and world.

I don't think we intend to say "no" to God but sometimes we do. You know how it goes. We get busy with things or we just unthinkingly flow through the routines of our lives and the days just spin on one after the other. It can happen, that as we say "yes" to everyone and everything and stop listening to the invitation God is offering to us to live more deeply connected to God's love and presence. I've heard it said that one of the possible good things that is coming out of our experience in this pandemic is time to reflect on what really matters in life. I know that has

happened for me. I've thought more about the importance of family and more about where I experience God, day by day. Has that happened for you? Even in the small experiences of being with those we love, there is an invitation from God to be more consistently connected to God's goodness and peace.

What are you going to do to fill up the time this week? You've probably already made decisions about that. And so, I'm asking us today, where is the invitation of God in all of that? Some time ago I read a bit of wisdom that floats up to the front of my thinking from time to time. It's the idea that at the end of our lives we won't be saying, "I wish I'd worked more, or made more money, or spent more time on the pursuit of trivial things." Instead, we'll never regret spending more time with those we love or giving ourselves to efforts that help others and make the world a better place. Jesus knows we'll never regret saying "yes" to God, more and more. There's an invitation God is laying on your heart just now to lay aside the "no" and say "yes" to God. Sometimes we call this the "Jesus prayer" but I'd like to think of it as saying "yes" to accepting God's invitation to filling the time in the most faithful and God-centered ways as possible. With that, let us pray. ***"God, I give you my heart again today. I accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and I want to back that up by making my life available for your purpose today. Help me to say "yes" to you, and use me in the days of this week in the ways that align my priorities and passions with you. I want to be at your table and celebrate your joy. In Christ, I pray. Amen."***