

From Him, Through Him and to Him

Second Title: Is There a Way to Make Sense Out of our Lives?

Romans 11:36

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Let's imagine a Greyhound bus draws up outside Garden Court and we all file right out that door and down and get into it and off we go down University Avenue on to Highway 94 and on. And after a little while, somebody says, "Where are we going?" and somebody else says, "Does anybody feel hungry? There is food back here." So we all break out the food and we have a really good lunch and then somebody says, "Why are we on this bus?" but somebody else says, "Let's sing some songs and let's play some games", so we sing some songs and we play some games.

Now, the situation is strange enough for an afternoon but think of the neurosis that sets in after three days, and then think of the situation after we've been in that bus for 20 years and some of us are beginning to wonder, now, okay at the beginning maybe it didn't matter where we were going, we were all having such a good time, but now we're not all having such a good time.

Some of us have got sick and some of us are enemies of each other and some of us are trying to protect ourselves in one corner against some others in another corner and some of us have too much food and some of us haven't enough food and some of us have died and have been thrown off the bus, now....surely, surely it's time to find out where we're going and of course, exactly how it would happen I am not sure but as children are born to us, they begin to ask the questions that we used to ask when we first got on the bus and they say, "Why are we on this bus? Where are we going in the bus?"

The parents just tell them, "Keep on laughing. Just keep on cleaning those windows," and bit by bit we begin to realize that actually every one of us is trying to pretend that it doesn't matter where we're going as long as we keep ourselves occupied doing things in the bus and of course some of us find the situation so absolutely maddening that we feel we have to get out of such a meaningless position somehow or other and there is of course only one way off and that is the way those who died found -- they were thrown off the bus -- and so one of us, unthinkable though it is, writes a book on how to commit suicide.

Of course, we all think that could never ever happen. Except that those of us who know the story of the publishing of that book, know it has already happened. Of course what drove us to look for a book like that was the meaninglessness of the other writers on the bus who wrote books purporting to explain why we were there and their books were so dumb. How to win by intimidation? How to be happy though married? How to make a fortune in real estate or in bus seats? And we just felt this is dumb.

All you're doing is telling us how to occupy ourselves while we are on this bus but it doesn't tell us why we're on it or where we're going. It just tells us how to spend our time while we're here and more and more of course, we all began to feel the meaninglessness of the whole situation and it's interesting you know, and you've probably already done it, all you have to do is to transpose the

scene from a Greyhound bus to a sphere spinning through the space of the universe at hundreds of miles an hour and you've got the predicament of the human race.

Now, let's imagine that a person suddenly appears on the bus not through the normal birth experience that the other children had, but he appears miraculously in the bus and he says, "The bus belongs to my Father, he is the owner", and then he takes some of us aside and he explains to us why we are on the bus and where we're going and why we do exist. You can imagine how invaluable would be the books written by the few of us that listen to that kind of information and so it is loved ones. So it is here on THIS Greyhound bus.

We realize the terrible truth that none of us on the bus can actually explain where the bus is going precisely because we're on it ourselves. We can't be outside it and look at it and see where it's going. And we can't explain who owns it or who keeps it going because we're on the bus and that is the prison in which we find ourselves. So the books that any of us write are limited to telling us how to spend our time while we're on it but they cannot tell us where it's going or why we're here.

The only books that can are the books written by the friends of this unique man that boarded the bus some years ago. Now where are those books? Where is that explanation? Oh without any question, in those first 11 chapters of Romans. They differ from all that Bertrand Russell produced, all that Plato produced, all that the greatest travelers on the bus have ever written, because they explain why we exist from outside our existence and those first 11 chapters of Romans are the clearest and the most profound explanation of the meaning of our lives that we have on our earth.

That's why we spent these 10 years studying those chapters in Romans. If you understand those and if you have entered into the life that they describe, the world can give you little more than that except maybe a little elaboration or illustration. Today of course, is an interesting day for us because we come to the very last couple of sentences in that unique explanation of the meaning of our lives. We come today to the last verse that concludes that clear explanation and maybe you would look at it, loved ones. It's Romans 11:36 and of course in the miraculous way that this man Paul was inspired by the Creator to write, he summarizes the whole explanation of the meaning of our lives with three prepositions and he talks about the Father of Jesus.

Romans 11:36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things." "For from him and through him and to him are all things." That's it. That's the meaning. First preposition is 'Ek' or as it appears in that verse 'ex autou' 'from him' and that's the first truth that we can breathe a sigh of relief and relax. Einstein was right. The order and design of our world shows beyond all doubt that it is not the result of the casting of a dice. That's the way Einstein puts it.

The order and design of our world shows clearly that God did not cast the dice, that what we experienced here is not simply the result of time plus chance. We can breathe a sigh of relief because Darwin was right. Even if there is any evolution or no evolution in the world, still you remember at the very end of "The Origin of Species" he says, "What a glorious way that our Creator has found to produce our world", that however he made it, there had to be someone who created at the very beginning the first proton, the first neutron. Whether after that it evolved or was again created in great stages by him is in a sense irrelevant to the fact that there had to be a personal mind to create the first cell.

From him, everything has come from the dear Father of Jesus. The Zoroastrians and the Socinians are wrong. It was not created by some Demiurge or some impersonal élan vital. It was created by a dear

Father who is the Father of Jesus, everything, everything. That means Bing Crosby's 'Blue of the Night'. That means Jack Benny's 'Stare'. It means Danny Kaye. It means Perry Como. It means all the comedians that we've ever heard. They came from God because that's what it says, "From him are all things."

Everything that is filled with laughter and filled with jokes, he made smiles and he made funny bones and he made tickles and he made laughter and he made singing saints. "From him are all things", yet it's amazing isn't it how we kind of take that into our minds but we still have the idea that our God is somehow a stern and foreboding kind of creature. Can you see loved ones that "from God are all things" means that all the happiest things that we know, come from God.

It is interesting, the more you and I obey and love him, the more we see the deeper meaning of 'from him' because 'Ek' really means 'out of him'. Out of the heart of God's nature have come all things, not just from him, but out of the heart of his nature. Even though we believe the world is not simply an emanation of God -- it is a creation -- yet God himself put part of his own nature in all the things that he has made so that actually the things that he has made show us what he himself is like.

I don't know if you like country western music. I don't but I like one song by old Tom Hall. "Old dogs and children and watermelon wine", do you know that one? It's a dear song and God is the one, who made all dogs and children and watermelon wine, and they come out of his very heart and when you see the faithfulness and the loyalty of an old dog, the dear heart that made that old dog must be more faithful and more loyal than the old dog.

When you see little children so trusting and so joyous, don't you see that the dear person who made them must have more happiness in his own heart? He must be more trusting. He must be more open. He must be simpler than they are and watermelon wine, oh He must be more exciting, more exhilarating, and more carefree than the greatest wine that ever was drunk. He has to be. The Creator who made these things made them out of his very own heart and so loved ones, every time we look at those things, we see a shadow of the perfection of those things in our Creator. That's what it means "from him are all things."

Actually it means you too. It's interesting but it's hard to find any of us who have not something good in us, isn't it? Now, you might differ from me a little on this, I would dislike the Hitler character as much I think as anybody in this room. But it's interesting if you look at those old movies and you see even that, that person who is regarded as one of the most hateful and the most evil man that ever lived and you see him receiving a bouquet of flowers from some little German girl in the early days, you sense there is even in that heart, some tenderness, some kindness.

Loved ones so it is in all of us, there probably isn't one of us here who hasn't some kindness or tenderness in some deep part of our hearts towards someone or something. That's what it means 'From him are all things'. There isn't one of us here in this room who have not something of the remains of God's image and character still manifesting itself in us. That's where all good comes from in the world.

I agree with anybody here that it is true that many of us have lost the freedom and the freshness to be ourselves that we had when we were little children. I agree with that. Old Wordsworth you remember says, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy! Shades of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy... At length the Man perceives it die away, and fade into the light of common day." I

think those lines would be felt by many of us to be true.

It is true that sometimes when we go out into the freshness and the cleanness of a spring morning, we can feel kind of shop soiled and worn and unclean inside and sometimes we feel yeah, we have lost some of that freshness that God gave us and when we look at swallows soaring so freely in the air and we look at the lightness of summer breezes and we look at the glinting of sun on the lake water, we see that somehow nature seems to have retained some of that and we begin to realize that there is a lot of this creation that exists through him, through God.

Somehow the birds seem to be able to do their thing because they have a deep confidence that there is someone who loves them. They seem to be free to forget themselves and to do what they were made to do, to sing joyously or to soar magnificently and somehow we begin to see that there's a great part of the universe that does exist simply through God, through his continuing to energize these creatures and these things with his own life and we begin to see that it's his punctuality and faithfulness and maintaining the laws of the universe that enable the sun to come up on the dot every morning.

Somehow we begin to realize it's because he holds together the protons and the neutrons that make up the wings of the birds and that holds together the resistance of the air that enables them to soar against the winds and the currents and we begin to sense, yeah, all things exist through him. If he dropped his little finger they'd all fall apart and then maybe you know some of us say, "Yeah, well, I mean you said all things but you just did point out the contrast that we often feel between the heaviness and the burdensome nature of our own lives and the lightness and the spontaneity of these natural things that you are talking about."

Surely, you can't say "through him, all things" when we find ourselves not reacting like that. Except, loved ones, that every twinge of a muscle that you and I feel, every line of worry in our faces, every strain that we experience at any time through the day is also the yearning and the message of God's spirit to tell us that we could live like the birds. So even those of us who don't rest upon him, exist through first of all his grace in not destroying us and throwing us off the bus and secondly, through the very messages that come to us through our anxiety and our worry and our sleepless nights. He is still getting through to us, there is a better way to live than this.

There is a way to live above these things. In other words, all things exist through God's expressing to us through his spirit that it's possible to live as free as the birds, that it is possible for God's spirit to remake us so that we experience the simplicity and the trustfulness of children again, so that we experience again the liberation and the freedom and exhilaration of soaring swallows, that it is possible to express the experience the cleanness and the freshness of the waves on the Hawaii beaches.

It is possible to express and experience again the exhilaration of salmon that leap in the waters. It is possible because the same Holy Spirit that enables them to act like that way is available to us, really, and that the reason we are so heavy and burdensome is because we're living like the people on the bus. We're spending all our time and all our energies and all our thoughts on how to make the life on the bus, which is not at all our home, as comfortable and pleasant as we can. Instead of spending all our energies trusting the dear Father to take us wherever he wants us to go in our lives and concentrating on doing what he has made us to do whether it pays us or whether it doesn't pay us and the Holy Spirit is constantly speaking to all of us those things.

So even old Auden's "In headaches and in worry, vaguely life leaks away.", even those headaches and worry are God's dear spirit trying to say to us, there's a better way if you trust me, the Holy Spirit and you begin to take me as your friend and begin to take me as the Lord and the Master of your life and begin to think what I guide you to think and do what I guide you to do, you'll begin to live like the freshest part of God's creation. Through him are all things.

Of course, the real reason for our whole existence is in that final preposition. It's the Greek word 'eis'. 'Eis autov', to him, onto him and possibly even into him, that's why we're here on earth. For that spirit of God, so to begin to mold our own lives and our characters that we are fit to live in heaven with our dear Father and his Son, that's it. That's it. He made us to be his friends, to live with him forever in an infinite universe that has more exhilaration and more beauty in it than we have ever touched. That's why God made us that we would live with him in friendship and in love.

It is interesting that the Greek word can mean 'into him' not that we would be absorbed and lose our individuality as the middle-eastern religions would have it, but that we would be involved intimately with him. We would come into him and be part of him and yet retain our own individuality and in that way express more of his glory in more diverse ways. That's why we're here loved ones. Really is a vale, a vale of soul making, it is, and this world is not our home. We are just passing through and the bus is going somewhere and we have just a very short span of life.

Most of us have just about 70 years to let the Holy Spirit of God that holds everything in existence begin to remake us so that we become like his Son Jesus and begin to live that free life that he lived and that's why we are here, you know. Now it doesn't matter how burdened you are, it doesn't matter what a prisoner you are, you might have thought that, "Shades of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy. At length the man perceives its die away, and fade into the light of common day," it doesn't matter how imprisoned you feel you are in the limitations of your own personality or in your own habits or your own thought patterns, it doesn't matter.

The dear Creator who made you first is able to remake you as he has done many of us in this room and the secret is he does it through your beginning to respect the dear Holy Spirit that holds in existence all that we see around us, really. He is the real meaning of Einstein's equation. He is the real energy that is the heart of the whole universe and he is able to bring a new life into you, he is. Really all a person has to do is to recognize as real these things that we have talked of this morning and to begin to live your life on the basis of them and most of all, to begin to speak to this dear spirit of God who is able to change you. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus we sense that something great has happened to us in your death and resurrection but we've been trying to make it real by our own will power. We see now that that's impossible. The swallows do not fly by their own will power. The daffodils do not bloom because they want to, they do it because of the Holy Spirit, your very own self, your very own life-energy and O Holy Spirit, we realize that you are a person and that our Lord Jesus called you "him" and he said that he, the Holy Spirit, will lead you into all truth. He will take of the things that are mine and impart them to you.

Holy Spirit, we need to be freed in our own lives and we need to begin to live as people who are released from the prison that we have been in for years. Holy Spirit, we would look to you now and begin simply to trust you and to acknowledge you and to be prepared to listen to any slight indication or impression that comes from you. So we intend to do that Holy Spirit and we ask you to remake us by making real in us the great resurrection that took place in Jesus. We ask this for his

glory.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.