

## Why Do We Exist? (Romans 11:36)

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Let's imagine that a Greyhound bus draws up outside Garden Court and we all file right out that door and down and get into it. Off we go down University Avenue, onto Highway 94 and on. 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 have a real good lunch. 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! Then think of the situation after we have been in that bus for 20 years. 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 are not all having such a good time. Some of us have gotten sick and some of us are enemies of each other. Some of us are trying to protect ourselves in one corner against some others in another corner. Some of us have too much food and some of us haven't enough food. Some of us have died and have been thrown off the bus. Now, surely, surely it is time to find out where we are going!" And of course, exactly how it would happen I'm not sure, but as children are born to us they begin to ask the questions that we asked when we first got on the bus. They say, "Why are we on this bus? Where are we going on this 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 are going as long as we keep ourselves occupied doing things in the bus. 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. There is of course only one way off, and that is the way those who died found -- they were thrown off the bus. So one of us, unthinkable though it is, writes a book on how to commit suicide. We all think that could never, never 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. 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 are doing is telling us how to occupy ourselves while we are on this bus. But it doesn't tell us why we are on it or where we are going. It just tells us how to spend our time while we are here. More and more of course we all began to feel the meaninglessness of the whole situation. It is interesting -- and you probably have 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 have 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 on the bus. And he says, "The bus belongs to my father. He is the owner." Then he takes some of us aside and explains to us why we are on the bus, and where we are going and why we do exist. You can imagine now invaluable would be the books written by the few of us that listened 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 are on it ourselves. We can't be outside it and

look at it and see where it is going. We can't explain who owns it or who keeps it going, because we are on the bus. 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 are on it, but they cannot tell us where it is going or why we are 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. 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 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 have come to the very last couple of sentences in that unique explanation of the meaning of our lives; we come today to the verse that concludes that clear explanation. Maybe you would look at it, it is Romans 11:36.

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. He talks about the father of Jesus: "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 is the meaning.

The first preposition is "ek", or as it appears in that verse, "ex, outto", from him. 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 is the way Einstein puts it. The order and design of our world shows clearly that God did not cast the dice. That what we experience 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 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, 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 -- 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 have ever heard. They came from God because that is what it says-- "from him are all things" -- 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 is 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 that 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 he has made, so that actually the things 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 Tom Hall -- "Old dogs and children and watermelon wine." Do you know that one? It is a dear song, and God is the one who made old dogs and children and watermelon wine. They come out of his very heart. 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 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, well, he must be more exciting, more exhilarating, 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. 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 is interesting, but it is hard to find any of us who have not something good in us, isn't it? 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 is interesting if you look at those old movies and see even that person who is regarded as one of the most hateful and most evil man that has 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 has 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.

Now, I agree with anybody here, 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. Wordsworth says, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy. Shades of the prison house begin to grow around the growing boy. At length the man perceives it fade away and die 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. Sometimes we feel we have lost some of that freshness that God gave us. When we look at swallows soaring so freely in the air, and we look at the lightness of summer breezes or the glinting of sun on the water, and we see that somehow nature seems to have retained some of that, 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 free to forget themselves and to do what they were made to do, to sing joyously or to soar magnificently.

Somehow we begin to see there is a great heart in the universe that does exist simply through God, through his continuing to energize these creatures and these things with his own life. We begin to see that it is his punctuality and faithfulness in maintaining the laws of the universe that enables the sun to come up on the dot every morning. We begin to realize that it is because he holds together the protons and 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 currents. We begin to sense that "all things exist through him." If he dropped his little finger they would all fall apart.

And then maybe some of us say, "You say 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 spontaneity of these natural things that you're talking about. Surely you can't say 'through him all

things' when we found 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 worry and our sleepless nights. He is still getting through to us that 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 is 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 the exhilaration of soaring swallows. That it is possible to experience the cleanness and 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 are 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, who wrote, "In headaches and in worry vaguely life leaks away." Even those headaches and worries are God's dear Spirit trying to say to us there is 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 Master of your life, and begin to think what I guide you to think and do what I guide you to do, you will 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 auton" -- "to" him, "unto" him, and possibly even "into" him. That is why we are 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 are here, loved ones. It really is a vale, a vale of soul-making. It is! And this world is not our home; we are just "a-passing through", and the bus is going somewhere. And we have just a very short span of life, most of us 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.

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 around the growing boy;  
At length the man perceives it 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! And really all a person has to do is 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.