

Becoming human- giving glory x07. Sunday 18th February_2018.

Human condition: “remember you are mortal”. Background text: Luke 12: 13 – 21. (READ) Genesis 2: 16 -17. (READ). They did not drop dead immediately – they began to die, in their soul death and becoming mortal.

AURIGA – can refer to a constellation of stars but originally it referred to a Roman slave – a chauffeur who stood behind a victorious general as he rode into a street in triumph, parading the captors. The Auriga had gladiator status, even though a slave and drove a biga drawn by 2 horses. The Auriga in victory parades stood behind the general holding a laurus crown over his head but his main task was to constantly lean forward and whisper in the triumphant general’s ear, “**Remember you are mortal**”. (*Memento homo – you are only a man*). *You will die*. We need to hear these words in our ear: spoken by God and not the voice of fear.



Picture: Auriga Roman

Our AIM for the beginning of this year will be for each of us individually and all of us together to explore what it means to be truly human. The Latin phrase “Memento Mori” – remember you have to die has passed into our language. It is a serious Christian practice to reflect on our mortality. It is a means of considering the vanity (passing Ecclesiastes 3) of earthly life and the transient nature of earthly goods and pursuits. Jesus in the NT was not averse to reminding people that we will all die and be called to give account for our lives to God. Example: The Parable of the Rich Fool (Bigger barns) Luke 12: 13 – 21.

Death entered as part of the human condition because of human choices. We have eaves-dropped on the Godhead as we previously referred to the Book of *Genesis in the Bible* where the primeval history of Chapters 1 – 11 causes us to consider and hear the voice of Godhead saying: -

Let US make humanity in our image – they will be like us and resemble us...So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female ... TEV Genesis 1:26 & 27.

These chapters are the Judeo-Christian mythic tale of the creation and population of the earth including the creation and Fall of humanity from “perfection”. (Myth – a story telling us a greater truth). The OT books tell the stories of the relationship of the so-called “People of God” with God and with other peoples. Broadly speaking the NT introduces Jesus of Nazareth, as the Messiah who challenges us with what it means to be truly human and about what essentially dis-figures human beings. He is revealed as the only true human being who comes as Saviour of the World – to redeem and restore humanity.

C.S. Lewis has Aslan say in the 4th Narnia book, “**Prince Caspian you come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve,**” said Aslan. “**And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth. Be content.**” We struggle with the fact that we are surely “hybrids”, fallen humans and not yet fully human?

What can we say having heard this statement that we were made in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26 & 27) and also what is developed in the whole of the agreed (Canon) of Christian Scripture? This is a foundational and central belief of Christians (and other Abrahamic faiths) that men and women are like God and resemble God and therefore God is **not totally other** or totally foreign to human beings. Through thousands of generations Abrahamic faiths have held this as self-evident but also taught that human behaviour and choices have estranged us both from God, one another and the rest of creation. Christians have argued that even after the Fall of human beings into doing evil as well as good that human beings still show something of the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 9:6 Human beings were made like God. James 3: 9 describes all human beings as made in God's likeness and therefore challenges us to treat all others with dignity and expectation).*

“All” INCLUSIVE! But it is also the specific teaching of Scripture that **all** – without exception **fall short of God's glory (Romans 3: 23). Romans 5: 12 Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned.** But we need to remember that the solution to death is presented in Jesus Christ: *For just as death came by means of a man, in the same way the rising from death comes by means of a man. For just as ALL people die because of their history with Adam, in the same way ALL will be raised to life because of their union with Christ. 1 Corinthians 15: 21.*

DEATH – mortality becomes a part of our human condition (Genesis 2: 16, 17). No one is immortal – except by gift of God (*Romans 6: 23*). The fact of our mortality is

something which should challenge our human pride and limit us in a way which makes us creaturely rather than thinking we are gods.

We have been asking: what does this consequence of “death” mean? Initially it meant the interruption of human fellowship with God. That **“walking-talking relationship” was interrupted**. When God comes to walk and talk with Adam (humanity) in the garden in the cool of the evening the man and the woman hide from God. (*3: 8 God cries: Where are you?*). Some obvious consequences are the entry of both **fear and loneliness into the human experience**. We also see **blame, shame and guilt** enter into the human consciousness (as GTH mentioned last week) **and lying and fake truth take over**.

All these and other things are **evidences of what has been called the FALL** – the fall from both God’s grace but also the marring of the glorious image of God in men and women. **Today we consider and hear the Spirit of God say - Remember you are mortal.**

The voice behind the general was meant to encourage a certain humility. Maybe this might cause him to show mercy to his captives?

But the phrase can also be used to encourage a zest to enjoy life to the full and make the most of each day and opportunity. There is apparently an Egyptian custom where during festivities a skeleton was brought out with people cheering “Drink and be merry for when you’re dead you will look like this”.

For us who follow Jesus it is good for us to remember our mortality and the promise of Jesus that he has come so that we may enjoy *life in all its fullness (John 10:10)* – a fulfillment of our physical, material, emotional, aesthetic and also spiritual needs. Jesus came to also to prepare me and you for death and a new heaven and earth. We must consider what the teachings of the Bible about not just mortality but also immortality and **Resurrection** (that unique belief). It is **not just Christians who are encouraged to think about death. E.g. Stoics are in fashion – being resigned to fate: -**

“Daily Stoic” To us moderns this sounds like an awful idea. Who wants to think about death? But what if instead of being scared and unwilling to embrace this truth we did the opposite? What if reflecting and meditating on that fact was a simple key to living life to the fullest?

*Meditating on your mortality is only depressing if you miss the point. It is in fact a tool to create priority and meaning. It’s a tool that generations have used to create real perspective and urgency. To treat our time as a gift and not waste it on the trivial and vain. Death doesn’t make life pointless but rather purposeful. **Christians of all people who believe in the resurrection of the body and the gift of eternal life (Romans 6: 23) should make it a priority to reflect on the fact that we will all die.** We do not I think necessarily tackle the great “fear of the unknown” with the clear teaching of Scripture. people need to be able to ask questions. The discovery of God’s truth can lead to freedom from fear and also hope for the future.*

Day of the Dead Oct 31st – November 2nd Día de Muertos – a Mexican holiday and celebrated all over Latin America but also acknowledged internationally. People from all

over the world travel to experience the macabre skeletal masks but also the vibrant festivity and remembering of those who have died and hoping that they too will be remembered when they die. Offerings of flowers and candles laid on the graves (See also **All Soul's Day** - those in purgatory not yet in heaven. The Office of the Dead is used to pray for those in purgatory. Celebrated on day after:- **All Saint's Day- those saints** who have reached heaven. These are Catholic Festivals on 1st and 2nd November celebrated by RC and Anglo-Catholics to commemorate the faithful departed. They are holy days of obligation). **Day of the Dead is not a Mexican version of Halloween** (a secular day) – although they are related. Halloween is a dark night of terror and mischief but the Day of the Dead over 2 days is more to do with life affirming joy. It originated several thousands of years ago with the Aztecs. The dead are still seen as members of the community; during the Day of the Dead they temporarily return to the earth. Many communities have a mish mash of celebrations with various Roman Catholic practices mixed in syncretistically with pagan ones.

Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians do not believe that the Bible teaches that there is purgatory, and many do not see the need to pray for the dead. We may feel concerned for loved ones who have died but we do not often spend time to reflect and explore (even at funerals there can be an ignorance of what the Bible teaches). **What is the relationship between the living and the dead? So, Evangelicals and Pentecostals drift** into services on either All Saints or All Souls days and find some comfort in remembering their dead and even in lighting a candle for them. We maybe can't explain why but we just know it is a help. Other Christians are horrified at the thought of doing this and make every effort to condemn and criticizing such practices.

I suggest that our time would be better spent in searching Scripture to find what it teaches about life and death, mortality and immortality and especially asking what the Bible says about the relationship the living should have with the dead. Discussions and learning between Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Catholics and others can help inform our understanding and practices. Such listening and reflecting with the help of the Holy Spirit can only promote better understanding of fellow Christians and also the practical command of Jesus to *love one another* as he has loved us.

The Christian Church in its many expressions has its Mission to the world – to express clearly and lovingly the message of Jesus Christ and to call everyone to follow Jesus. This will only be helpfully reinforced if the world sees how our discipleship is expressed in love. **Remember you are mortal – you are human – you will die. BUT also know that: Sin pays its wage – death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6: 23.**