

## ***“What’s it all about?”***

**January 17, 2010**

*Text: Isaiah 60:1-5, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11*

### I.

In these days, as the New Year unfolds and we prepare for the year ahead, our lives are all put in perspective by the overwhelming despair and desolation of the destructive earthquake this past week in Haiti.

In reaching out to Haiti, the challenges before the international community are enormous. What to do? How to do it? When to do it? And on and on. Very likely, our greatest challenges are organizational:

- How to help the Haitian government pick itself up and become operational
- How to coordinate the massive aid effort, as supplies come in from around the world.
- How to provide the necessary security, help account for the thousands who have perished, assist those who have survived and, over time, put Haiti on a path to rebuild their nation.

With their tragic elements, what these sorts of natural disasters remind us—again and again—is that what our lives are about is LIFE. We want to preserve life and enable life; and towards this end, we want to lift up hope.

**What’s it all about?** What is God about? What’s the Bible about? What is our life of faith about? And what’s the role of Jesus in all of this?

What it’s all about, friends, is LIFE. That is God’s unending passion breathed into the world at the dawning of creation.

*Let there be light*, God said—God’s first words in the Bible—*and there was light*. And later, *Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind ...* and it was so. And still later, *Let us make human kind in our image ...* and so it was, *male and female God created them*.

And so we are created in God’s own image, every human being reflecting the image of the divine ... created to honor life and exalt life; and we do that through love.

But this love part is something we have to work at. Outside of our love of family (and not even then, all the time), it doesn’t come to us easily. It comes through our relationships ... and as we know, our relationships can be difficult.

In our relationships, we have to consider the feelings and thoughts of others. We have to learn of their life-context, listen to their personal story.

## II.

In our natural state, what we're about is survival. This is true of all forms of life. The life-impulse to survive is endemic to our nature. It's inscribed into our DNA. If we think about it, all forms of life have this impulse: to survive and to see the light of tomorrow.

1. In the plant world, plants bend naturally toward the sun so they can photosynthesize the sunlight, grow and therein improve their prospects for living.
2. In the animal kingdom, animals have all sorts of innate strengths and tendencies that enable them to survive and perform their natural function in the life cycle of the natural world.
3. In our human world, we, too, are bound by these survivalist impulses. The consequence of this, of course, is that we have this bending toward self-centeredness. It's simply built in to our survivalist nature. Our inborn tendency is to look at life and understand it from our own point of view.

Simply put, we want to live and towards this end, we tend to take care of ourselves first.

## III.

And so, God's greatest challenge with us is to get us to ...

1. glorify the holiness of LIFE by loving one another and sustaining one another;
2. and to look at life from the point of view of the other person ...
3. It's not accidental that one of the core tenets of every religion is to do to others what we would want them to do to us.

With all of this in mind, early on, God gave us covenants to live by, covenants that would help keep us from destroying one another. When you think of the Ten Commandments, in the *big picture*, what are they about? They're about preserving LIFE, exalting life, honoring life.

You see, God knows what kind of destructive evil can rise up in the human spirit when we kill, steal, commit adultery, tell lies, and covet things that belong to other people. All of these acts tend to disrupt life and to twist and undermine relationships. And so, the THOU SHALL NOT'S are commanded to us—why? So that we might live.

What God's purposes are about, friends, is LIFE. That's what God is about; that's what the Bible is about. The two major events in all the Old Testament—the EXODUS and the EXILE—are about God's calling of Israel to life.

1. There was no life under the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt.
2. There was no life in Babylonian captivity during the Exile.

Every pronouncement of the biblical prophets, who were Israel's conscience and God's messengers, was about life—exhorting people out of waywardness and away from their ultimately-destructive ways.

***From 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah*** (8<sup>th</sup> century Before the Common Era): *The wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ... and a little child shall lead them ...*

*And they will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord ... For God knows that when we're full of the knowledge of the Lord, that we'll make better choices ... and God's purposes will be realized ...*

***From Jeremiah*** (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE): *The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts ... And I will be their God and they will be my people ...*

And why would God *put my law within them and write it on their hearts*? Clearly, so that we might live.

***From 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah*** (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) ... ***from our reading this morning:***  
*Arise and shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you ... nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

*Lift up your eyes and look around ... and let the light come!*

It's like, Hello! Don't all human beings basically want the same things? Freedom from oppression ... equal opportunity ... the basic necessities of life ... adequate food, shelter, health care ... etc., etc.

**What's it all about?** It's about LIFE.

#### IV.

What God delights in is human beings—indeed all of creation—fully alive. Alive to the promptings of love; alive to the goodness in the human heart; alive to gifts of the mind, body and spirit.

God called us to life at the genesis of the world. God affirmed that life—again and again—through the covenants and through commandment truth. And God affirmed all of that still more through the rise of prophetic voices, culminating at last in the sacred birth of Jesus at a manger in Bethlehem.

The prophets had foretold of it; the people had long awaited it. The birth of one about whom the fourth gospel—the gospel of John—said:

***And the word became flesh and lived among us ... and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.*** And in him we see God's purposes incarnate, in the flesh.

Jesus, too, was about life ... life in all of its abundance; life in all of its glory. And in him and through him—through his interaction with others ... his abundant compassion ... his courage to speak truth to power—through all this, he taught us to love ... and to be welcoming and inclusive of all people.

He taught us the value of trying to make every relationship work. It's not easy and at times we fail; but the hope is always burning: to honor all people, even those different from us in whatever way. In this way, we honor LIFE and we serve God's purposes in our communities and in the world beyond.

## V.

### **What's it all about?**

It's about us understanding the richness of our traditions, finding ourselves in our sacred story and being fully alive to the promises of God.

When we're *alive to God's promises*, the gifts God has given us are alive in us, seeking—again and again—to uncover the common good. And of course that means working together ...

This was one of Paul's greatest challenges ... getting the people to work together ...

1. *Now there are a variety of gifts, said Paul, but the same Spirit;*
2. *there are a variety of services, but the same Lord ...*
3. *and a variety of activities, but the same God who activates all of them in everyone.*

*And to each—GET THIS—is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.***

That's the core of his message to the Corinthian church—right there. ***Use your gifts (which are a manifestation of the Spirit) for the common good.***

In the Corinthian Church, to some were given the gift of wisdom; to others, the gift of knowledge. To others were given the gift of healing; to others, the gift of miracles. To still others were given the gifts of prophecy and to others the gift of discernment.

What Paul wanted them to know is that—for each of them—whatever their gift, it was given through the same Spirit ... for the purpose of lifting up the common good.

It's the same with us. We all have gifts, given through the same Spirit, which, when meshed together, promote the common good for our church and for the community

we serve. We have gifts of ... teaching ... nurture ... organization ... spirituality ... music ... service ... discernment ... business skills ... accounting ... and on and on.

We are a congregation of gifted people. When we pool our resources—our gifts—we are a vital presence here in Miami Lakes ... each of us, doing our part, to lift up the common good, both for our church and for the community we serve.

## VI.

And so our challenge as Christians, friends, is to continue to find LIFE-giving ways of doing precisely this.

*Arise and shine*, said the prophet, *for your light has come*. The light is always coming. The key is for us to open ourselves to the light so the light can shine through us, illumining our gifts to serve God's purposes.

And whether it's in Haiti or here in South Florida, our mission is clear:

- To use our gifts for the common good ...
- Make sacrifices for the common good ...
- And go the second mile for the common good.

For when the common good is served, LIFE is honored. And that brings joy and contentment to our Creator God. What's it all about? For God, for Jesus, for the Bible and for our Christian faith, therefore, it's about LIFE.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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