

"GOD IS REAL, ARE YOU?"
Psalm 23; I John 1:1-10
Sermon preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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Sometimes Church seems to be about the business of proving to a skeptical world God exists.

But is it the job of the Church to prove the existence of God?" I don't think so, especially when you realize not once in all the Bible is any attempt ever made to "prove" the existence, let alone the reality of God. Instead God is always a given.

The first verse of the Bible sets the tone. In Genesis 1:1 we read: **"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth the spirit of God swept over the face of the deep."** Very matter of factly the author of Genesis makes it plain God alone is the creating force behind the universe.

This God centered theology is put in a sharper focus in the prologue of John's Gospel. **"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were created through him..."**

Thus, the fourth evangelist declares Christ is the agent of creation and life.

This theme of God's eternal presence continues in the First Letter of John who writes:

"We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard and seen and touched...concerning the Word of life.

So, the ultimate concern of the Bible from the beginning of the Old Testament until the end of New Testament is not whether God is real. The big question is **"Are you real?"** In other words, have you discovered what it takes to be an authentic human being whose aim is not just the survival of the fittest, but the enjoyment of life to the fullest? Remember the first question of the Westminster Catechism? "What is the chief end of man? To know and serve God and enjoy him forever."

In the book, **"The Power of Myth"**, Joseph Campbell argues, **"People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think what we are seeking is an experience of being alive so that our life experiences on the purely physical plain will have resonance within our innermost being and reality so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive."**

Once you experience becoming fully alive you also experience becoming fully

human and the Bible makes it clear, your fullest humanity can only be realized through knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Any alternative lifestyle will be empty and unfulfilling. John Lennon and Paul McCartney capture the essence of this dull and damning existence in the song Elanor Rigby.

Look at all the lonely people!

Elanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been,

Lives in a dream,

Waits at the Window, Wearing a face

That she keeps in a jar by the door

Who is it for?

All the lonely people, where do they all come from?

All the lonely people, where do they all belong?

Father McKenzie, writing the words of a sermon

That no one will hear

No one comes near

Look at him working, darning his socks in the night

When nobody's there, what does he care?

All the lonely people, where do they all come from?

All the lonely people, where do they all belong?

The world is full of lonely people whose lives are pot marked with broken dreams and unrealized expectations.

In the novel "**The Remains of the Day**" we have a character study of the self-repression of the human spirit.

Mr. Stevens is head butler of Darlington Hall. He comes from a long line of gentlemen's gentlemen. He's an expert at what he does and takes great pride in his work, but underneath it all he is unfulfilled and unhappy. He lives to serve others, but he refuses to let others serve him. He hides behind a mask of quiet dignity but deep down he is lonely and afraid.

The more you learn about him the more you become convinced he's not even close to living up to his fullest potential. You may even sense that he's far more gifted than his employer, Lord Darlington, but Steven's self imposed isolation forbids him from removing his mask and becoming a real human being. And so he remains trapped in Darlington Hall, old and tired, bitter and neglected, never once knowing what it means to be an authentic human being who can love and be loved.

In the Bible God reveals himself to be our loving Father, but God also reveals himself to be our beloved brother in Jesus, a very real flesh and blood human being. In the

sacred mystery of his death and resurrection, the beloved community is called to remind each other the promise of the Resurrection isn't just for the dead; it's especially for the living. Resurrection is real. Eternal Life is real when you allow yourself to become real. Jesus shows us how to live life to the fullest. And that phrase "Eternal Life" doesn't mean your existence is prolonged to go on and on and on like the Energizer Bunny. Instead, your Eternal Life is a reflection of the life of Jesus. The true measure of life is based on quality rather than quantity. Your goal should not be simply to add years to your life, but life to your years. What counts is whether your life is large and full, not empty and small.

Listen again to what Joseph Campbell said: **"I think what we are seeking is the experience of being alive. So that our life experiences on the physical plain will have resonance within our innermost being and reality, so we actually feel the rapture of being alive."**

Almost everyone knows someone you would call **"larger than life."** You may conger up the various adjectives that would describe their personalities: **"clear thinking maybe even brilliant, bold, adventurous, kind, compassionate."** There's the beginning of a list of character traits. You can make it longer, but there is one word that you cannot keep off the list and that's the word **"real."**

Read the Gospels, contemplate the interaction between Jesus and all those who came his way. What was it that either attracted or repelled them? What made people want to follow him or kill him? The answer: Jesus was real and his **"realness"** brought out either the best or worst in people.

Whenever a theologian makes the claim Jesus was unique, it's just another way of saying Jesus is real, fully human, and totally authentic in his personhood, everything God had in mind when he placed Adam and Eve in the garden, found its full flower in Jesus. God is real; if you have any doubts then look at Jesus' life and remember Jesus invites you to share in his life so you can be authentic in your relationships with God, each other and yourself.

Again, think of that person you consider to be larger than life. If this person is really real he or she would be the first to fully subscribe to these words of our New Testament lesson. **"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

Real people are not afraid to face the truth about themselves as the spirit of Jesus frees them to experience the rapture of being alive. Of course, sometimes experiencing the rapture of being alive means also experiencing the pain of being alive. Life isn't just made up of multiple resurrections. There are also multiple crucifixions, but if you are willing to endure it all with Christ by your side, then your joy will be complete. But before this can happen, you must dare to become vulnerable.

But how many of us let others minister to our own deepest personal hurts and pains? Remember the butler in Remains of the Day. He's an expert in what he does and takes great pride in his work, and yet deep down he is unfulfilled and unhappy. He lives to serve others, but he refuses to let others serve him. He hides behind his mask of quiet dignity, but deep down he's alone and afraid.

I was once in a gathering of pastors. As our time together started, we all had our masks on. **"How you do'in? Great, we met our budget and attendance is up!"** **"Oh yeh! Hey, I'm taking this great course on esoteric theology. I'm learning a lot."** Another said, **"I just got an article published."** And then, out of nowhere one pastor took off his mask and talked of his crucifixion. **"I'm really not doing very well. I'm feeling very depressed lately and I feel like I'm just going through the motions. I really need you all pray for me."** And with that all the masks came off, fears and flaws were put out on the table and guess what, all of us in the room were able to sense the presence of Jesus who was there all along. But until that time we weren't allowing our humanity to be with him.

God is real: are you? You can be, flaws and all, if you trust His risen presence to be in our midst as together we become the Church of Christ and carry one another's burdens, for Jesus sake. Amen.

Let us pray!