

Bernard Sidney Cockerill: Address on the Christian Hope Revd Nick Nicholas

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – though you have not seen Him, you love Him and you believe in Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Nicky Gumbel the Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton tells of a Swedish au pair whose English was not quite so good. One day seeing the children she was looking after misbehaving, she blurted out, not what she meant to say, what on earth are you doing? But rather: what are you doing on earth? It's a good question: What are you doing on earth?

What is the purpose of your life, the driving force of your being? If anyone had asked Bernard that, he might well have answered by referring to scripture, such as Ephesians 2: I'm saved by grace, through faith, and I am God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for me to do.

Bernard's purpose was to live for Christ Jesus, from that day when he was 10 years old and signed a 'decision' card accepting Christ. A decision affirmed when he was 12 years, as Paul has told us, when Bernard saw a wonderful passion play during which the lights went out and an overhead storm of lightning & thunder made him feel he was really there at the crucifixion! Leaving him, as he travelled home on a bus, 'floating on air', not because of the potholes but because of the faith experience! And though he soon had to leave education school at 14 through sickness, a year later he went on to teach in Sunday school. Serving Christ Jesus was the purpose of his life. What's yours? What are you doing here on earth?

Being a Christian didn't make Bernard a killjoy, even if he was against watching TV on a Sunday, unless it was Christmas Day and then it was Ok to watch the Queen's speech. Sundays and Christmas days became memorable events for the open house that was given, the church friends who gathered, the fellowship that was shared.

Being a Christian didn't disengage Bernard from life. He served in the war, he found work he could do, he married and delighted in Amy his wife, God gifting them with 3 children. He was skilful in many arts, even sewing, making clothes for Angela when she was young. He painted in water and oils. He carved wood. He enjoyed gardening. He pursued family history. He loved horses, and liked going to agricultural shows to see the Shires.

Being a Christian didn't lead to Bernard rejecting God when Amy's diabetes led to her losing her legs, and being confined to a wheel-chair, leading to him taking early retirement to care for her. Such trials proved the genuineness of his faith, showing it to be of greater worth than any gold he might have gained by not giving up work.

Being a Christian didn't make Bernard a perfect man. In his later years of widowhood when his family thought he could do with some help at home, his strong streak of stubborn independence caused them worry and frustration as he insisted, despite his increasing frailty, on doing what he could for as long as he could, even to cooking his own meals. Yet the song of Bernard's life was never: I did it my way, but rather for me be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live.

What is the song of your life?

In our chapel seating we now place a chair in the space we kept free for Bernard's wheelchair but no chair of ours can replace his presence, his joy in the Lord and his part in our fellowship. Yet though we mourn his passing we also rejoice in it, for we know that though he has died he is not dead. Angels escorted him to

heaven and the Lord greeted him, saying “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”

Where will you be escorted when you die? What judgement will Christ speak over your life?

It’s the mantra of our society that what drives your living today decides your destiny tomorrow. Do well at school to go to college to get a good career. Work hard to better yourself, to get the promotion, to earn the extra money to buy a house, or the new car, or to fulfil your must do bucket list before you die. But will any of that lead to Jesus inviting you to share His happiness?

Michael Curry in his sermon at the royal wedding reflected on Solomon’s ancient words that love is as strong as death. That same Solomon also said this:

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;

I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my labour ...

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done

and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Filling your life with all your eyes desire is no guarantee of ultimate happiness. But there is something that is.

We heard it in Psalm 1. The poet begins with what doesn’t do it. Ultimate happiness he or she says is not found by going along with those who care nothing for God, who want us to join them in doing our own thing, who laugh at the idea of a God who cares for us.

Rather this is how it is to be found: by delighting in the law of the Lord, or, the New Testament reveals, as Christ Jesus is the one who fulfils the law, ultimate happiness is to delight in Him, is to walk with Him through the hours of our living.

If like Bernard that is your life, if you delight in Christ Jesus and in

using the gifts God has given you to serve His purposes then rejoice, for like Bernard you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul, an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

Yet there are people, and some perhaps here today, to whom Jesus cannot say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Come and share my happiness." for they do not know Him.

Yet it doesn't have to be that way. Even now the Lord is placing a spiritual decision card in your heart. As those who love Bernard open your heart to the Christ who gave him life, and inspired his being.

Say yes to Him and even today you will be planted as a tree by streams of water, a tree rooted in the river of life that flows from God's throne, and you will yield a harvest of fruit, a bounty of love and joy and peace, that blesses you as you offer it to others, a tree whose leaves will never wither, a tree standing, along with Bernard and Amy and all who love Christ Jesus, in the gathering of the righteous, a tree whose eternal being will never perish.

Today may we all rejoice together in the salvation of our souls and the happiness of our Lord, to the glory of God, the one God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.