

“Fascination”
Ezekiel 37:1-14; Revelation 21:1-4
May 19, 2019

If we human being are anything, we are creatures of fascination. We are not merely curious, like cats, or restless, like squirrels or birds darting to and fro. We have and take interest in matters in ways that go beyond instinct, beyond passing fancy, in a way deeper than a simple glance. We are creatures of the double-take, of inquisitiveness, of attention that can be riveted on simple things, on complex things, or anything that we put our minds to.

And if truth be known, one of the things we put our minds to is ... ourselves. We spent more time, money, and effort trying to analyze who we are, what we do, and why we do any of it. We constantly survey our political opinions, gauge our tastes for new products on the market, while we snoop and pry into our neighbors' affairs so that, among other things, we can keep up with the Joneses.

Fascination with ourselves explains a lot of what we do, from the space program to visiting psychiatrists, from a public education system that once was the envy of the world, to the keeping of personal diaries. It is as if we have decided that we are one of the most important, if not THE most important, game in town.

Interestingly enough, our God tends to agree with us on this one. Yes, God thinks that we ARE terribly important. In the Psalms we can read that only angels have been created higher than we. And in Genesis we are taken one step further, and are said to have been created in God's own image. Make no mistake: our origins are divine.

But most of us these days follow along with the saying coined not too many centuries ago that “the proper study of mankind is man.” There isn't much that is divine about that. But scripture begs to differ, because there is one thing that persons of faith have recognized, but which many people, by and large, tend to ignore these days: we may indeed be one of the most important games in town - in the world - perhaps in the universe, at least as far as we can tell.

But religion then asks the next question, why are we important? Is it merely because of who each one of us happens to be, in and of ourselves? Is it because of anything we have done, any great achievements made - or dreamed of - which others might make into reality in the world of tomorrow? Is it because we are lords of this planet, and what we say goes, whether it be for better or for worse?

Many people today would say, “Yes, indeed, that is the answer. That is why we are so important.” These people say that we have no need to look any further than ourselves to see where our true greatness is based, to see where can be found the pearl of great price, to discover the meaning of what life, death, the universe, and everything are all about - if they have any meaning at all.

But faith offers a differing perspective, saying that what is important is not who we are, but how we have come into being; what is fascinating about us is not so much what we have done, but what can be done for us if we open our minds and hearts to an authority higher than ourselves. It’s not that we are at the top of creation which is so fascinating, but it is because we acknowledge that there is a Creator - now there’s the crux of the issue! And once we have recognized these truths, then we will find that our true greatness is found outside of ourselves, that the pearl of great price is to be found outside our grasp, and that life, death, the universe, and everything do have meaning only because of some One who has given them meaning, and not because of our place at the apex of material existence.

I suspect that even parts of the Church forget all this occasionally. Some people have mentioned to me - and these people are regular church-goers - that occasionally they ask themselves why they even bother to worship. (Obviously they have never attended Colebrook!) Some other people of faith wonder if the effort to live by a higher standard, by a greater authority, is worth it all - because so many other folk seem to be having a much better time of it, living as if there is nothing beyond themselves. And some question that even if there is a God, can God be possibly concerned with just little ol’ you

and me? Doesn't God have more important matters to attend to? Aren't there worlds without end? Who cares about this little planet that we call Earth?

Well, let's have a look again at what Ezekiel reported as having happened to him in Chapter 37. At verse 4, God says to Ezekiel, "Therefore prophesy and speak to them." There already is an incredible task for the Church: Prophecy! Speak! Now, God could simply speak into the thin air and achieve his purpose, as he did during the creation when he said things like "Let there be light!" "Let there be the firmament." "Let there be dry land." "Let us create." But after a certain point in the process of creation, God found that he had somebody to talk to. He had somebody to share his work with - to share his love with.

And so we might almost say that since the creation of humankind, we have been partners with the Creator in God's task of the hour. Talk about fascinating! And what have those tasks been?

In Ezekiel, the task was to bring new life back to the people of the Promise, the Chosen ones of God, the Elect. Because at the point in their history when Ezekiel worked among God's people, they were alive - but not to God. They were farflung, and needed to be brought together again. They were divided, and needed to be healed. They had fallen short of the glory of God, and required sanctification. They were in despair, and looked for meaning.

In other words, they had lost their sense of fascination, of interest in themselves as children of their Maker - and they were no longer fascinated with the Creator, either. They were little more than dry bones in a wasteland. Ezekiel was called to rekindle their zest, their love of life, that courage to live not just for oneself, but for something far greater. And we, as the Church, are challenged to do the same. Once we have been renewed and restored and made worthy of greater tasks, we as guardians and keepers of a great inheritance, passed down to us through the ages, will then be able to pass that zest

for faithful living on to those whom we love, those who are to follow us in generations and ages to come.

For you see, *that* is what defines, in one sense anyway, what the Church is. We are not so much what we say we are, we are (rather) what God has for us to do. We do not set our own agenda, but we have our work already waiting for us. We are not here to advertise ourselves, but to proclaim the love of the One who has called us together in the name of all that is Holy. We are not here to serve ourselves, but to serve whoever is in need or in want - in want of love, sympathy, compassion, justice, security, assistance, challenge, meaningfulness, joy, hope, peace, and righteousness.

The Book of Revelation tells us that one day all these things shall be achieved, and that there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor tears ... nor shall there be any more pain. But until that day we have ample to keep us busy, to make our days rich in activity, to fill our lives with blessings innumerable. For we have found that there are fascinating treasures to be had if we only would stop looking to ourselves, and look beyond; that there are inexpressible joys to be known if we only would stop trying to entertain ourselves, but instead seek the happiness of others; that there will one day be rest triumphant and a peace that passes all understanding, if we seek out the voice which promises to one day declare to all who faithfully follow Christ, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Let us pray: