

Column – God wants us to be fully alive

Finding meaning in life is a well-nigh universal endeavour and it takes many different paths. Take, for example, the phenomenally successful American actor Bruce Willis (b 1955), who at the height of his career commanded 20 million dollars per movie.

In an interview before being diagnosed with progressive form of dementia which causes difficulties with language and comprehension, Willis was asked why he had pursued life so vigorously, even recklessly. He said that as a young man, within the span of two months, he almost lost a brother and a sister. Then, a friend who had just moved to New York was killed instantly when the taxi in which he was travelling was sideswiped and jumped the curb.

These events, he said, caused him to realize the fragility of life and prompted him to adopt a “Have a blast while it lasts!” approach to life.

No doubt, many share Willis’ approach. Indeed, we find it -- of all places -- in the Bible: “There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour,” says the writer of Ecclesiastes.

What prompted the writer (traditionally thought to be King Solomon) to adopt this view of life was not that

different from Willis' experience. No matter how much you amass, no matter how wisely you order your life, no matter how many sensual things you take on . . . in the end you die. For both Willis and the writer: all is vanity or meaninglessness.

But is the writer of Ecclesiastes really endorsing this view of life or merely reporting it? G. S. Hendry gives us this thought:

“The melancholy refrain, ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity’, is not his verdict upon life in general, but only upon the misguided human endeavour to treat the created world as an end in itself.” Hendry’s observation might be further simplified: “If we’re not chasing God, we’re merely chasing the wind.”

St. Augustine of Hippo would agree. In his *Confessions*, he writes: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.” The problem is that we human beings try to still the restless heart with such things as money, sex, power, pleasure, etc.

The God revealed in Jesus calls us to take an entirely different approach, to cast down our ambitions, dreams, passions and indeed life itself. Why? So, our humanness might be deconstructed? To make us slaves?

No, in order that He may give us these things back renewed and restored, so we may be free indeed and have life to the full. Jesus expresses this paradox when he says: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25).

In conversation with Jesus’ words, Irenaeus, a 2nd century church leader, wrote: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive!” That is what God wants to do in each of our lives, to make us more human and give us true satisfaction. Why not stop chasing wind and begin pursuing Him?

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer).

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