

9 August 2009  
B Proper 14  
RCL

## What Is God Doing?

Sometimes I am bewildered by the contrast between what Scripture says and what our life experience is. For example:

- + Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6.35)
- + Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. (6.51)
- + If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move... (Matthew 17.20)
- + [Jesus prayed to His Father for the disciples], '...I ask you to protect them from the evil one.'" (John 17.15)

These are all wonderful promises and straight from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. There are other passages of God's word promising protection, the meeting of life's needs, the avoidance of death, and other blessings. We are all aware of them, if we are Bible readers, and I suppose that you are as puzzled by them as I am. For our life experience and the history of our people, the church of God as well as the rest of the human race, do not match these sayings.

We have all come to Jesus, that's why we're gathered together in this church, and we still know hunger and thirst. There are stoutly devoted followers of Christ in the ranks of the homeless and they are hungry and thirsty. Millions of followers of Christ have died in famine down through the centuries. What does the Lord Jesus mean?

We have all eaten of the consecrated Bread at this and other altars, the Bread that Jesus says is Himself. The promise is that such a one will live forever, and yet we still have funerals in our church. We die every bit as often as the rest of the world. Jesus is the Bread of Life Himself and yet He died, horribly, tortured on a cross. What does the Lord Jesus mean?

Jesus says that if we have even a little faith, we can move mountains and other great works. Yet thousands of years of faithful believers, great saints and small saints, have asked for all sorts of things, great and small, and have been denied. What does the Lord Jesus mean?

The Lord Himself prays for His followers that they be protected from the evil one. Yet anyone who is minimally aware of life knows that evil stalks our world, the good suffer,

followers of Jesus have been murdered in His name by other followers of Jesus. Evil is present and powerful in our world. What does the Lord Jesus mean?

This is an important question. People who have difficulty believing the person and message of Jesus point to His own words and those of His followers and observe that reality does not match up with His teachings. However much they want to trust Him, they can't. His words seem either demented or prevarication. We, who have given ourselves in trust to God working in this Lord Jesus, are assailed by doubts at different points in our lives, often when something hurtful or difficult comes to us. What does the Lord Jesus mean?

The first step toward an answer is to note that Jesus is not stupid, demented, or lying. Not stupid, because his history and teaching show a man perfectly able to interpret life subtly and well. Not demented because, however puzzled we are by some parts of Him, other parts show an appreciation of reality that would do credit to any politician. Jesus' integrity shines through the story of His life. That integrity is so great that His followers have been willing to die for Him; others who cannot bring themselves to believe His message admire His life. Jesus is no liar.

So what does Jesus mean by these statements that are so attractive, so central to our understanding of Him and of life, and yet are so manifestly untrue? The answer, as with so much in our spiritual life, lies in Jesus' resurrection. Up to the resurrection, Jesus could have been any other good man doing good works in the name of a good God; good men and women are often chewed up by the world and thrown onto the scrap heap. So it was with Jesus. Until the resurrection. The resurrection showed that God is doing something new, something unforeseen, something astounding. The resurrection shows that the worst that can befall us, death, our own or those we love, has been trumped by God's good will, God's grace, God's love, for Her frail creation and creatures.

The resurrection is the starting point for interpreting what God is doing in our world. If the resurrection is true, all our standard wisdom is turned on its head. If the worst that can happen has been reversed, then no less the lesser evils as well. Against the background of the passionate divine love revealed by the resurrection, all the lesser evils, though real and hurtful, have been defeated as well. So Jesus' words are real and true and powerful, filled with the energy of God. Their central focus is not the passing circumstances of this world and our individual lives, but rather the ultimate destiny that God intends for each of us. We are called to battle hunger, disease, fear, war, death – all the hurtful evidence of evil in our world, because God does not will that His children should suffer. But when we do suffer, we should know that God has not lied to us, has not tricked us, has not abandoned us. His focus, His horizon, His intention, is far wider and more intense than the passing circumstances of our world.

In that which is to last forever, in the eternity of life with God, there is no hunger, no thirst, no mountains standing in the way, no death, no evil of any sort. God in His Christ infuses the world with Her presence and power for change and for good, but at the same time points us beyond what is passing to that which is truly lasting. It is that which Jesus focuses on. It is that about which He teaches us. It is that that He experienced Himself and into which He calls each of us.

Jesus is a competent, trustworthy truth-sayer. It's just that His truth is far more encompassing than our truth. Our challenge is to widen and deepen our truth to match His.