

Vicar's Pastoral Letter

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Subject : We don't have all the answers.

Dear Friends,

I wonder if you're the kind of person who likes to have certainties about everything? If you are then I guess that at times life must be difficult because there are only two things that you can know for sure: the first is that you've been born and the second is that you'll die and anything in between those two you cannot predict or ultimately control. Are you able or willing to accept this fact of life especially those of you who tend to leave or abandon things you can't control? The trouble is that we're brought up to believe that there's an answer to every question but there isn't and the sooner we accept that in an open and not a grudging way then the more acceptable life will become. We all know that knowledge is power and the more answers you know then the more powerful you become and hence the more control you have or, at least, like to think you have because ultimately there is so much that you can't control. If you are a so-called "control freak" then life must indeed be difficult but no more difficult than you're making it yourself.

A lady recently said to me "You're supposed to be giving us the answers but all you've done so far is raise questions!" Yes, my friend, and that's the way it's going to stay because I'm not the kind of person who dispenses answers even though I am a clergyman and therefore in the "answer business": in fact I don't want just to ask questions but difficult questions, painful questions and challenging questions: the kind of questions that make life uncomfortable. But please know that I'm not inflicting on you anything that I don't live with myself and questions that I find it difficult to bear such as "what about the thousands who have recently lost their lives in Burma and China? How precious were their lives to God?" "What about the starving mother watching her emaciated baby die?" "What do we say to the parents who have lost their children or the loving wife or husband whose partner walks out on them even though all they wanted was a happy family?" These questions and a million more whys convince me that life is totally unpredictable and often, in earthly terms, wickedly unfair. So, no, you won't get answers from me as if I was some kind of spiritual doctor dispensing cures!

So what good am I? And what's the good of the whole Christian thing? The answer in a sentence is that it can give you the strength to cope with the questions to which there are no answers. It begins with an act of faith in that you choose to believe in God. You may wish to bail out at this point and conclude that there is no God. This is a perfectly reasonable conclusion to come to but the question I would ask is this "if you don't believe that there's a God of any description then what is life but a sick joke?" You may choose to be part of this joke without rhyme or reason and have the strength to bear it but I'm afraid I haven't. I need to believe in something because although it doesn't give me all the answers it nevertheless gives me something to live for. I defy the absurdity of life and the all pervasive force of evil every time I affirm that there is a power greater than the one I see in the world and ultimately that love is stronger than hate and that good conquers evil. I can't prove it: I believe it and it gives me a purpose in living which otherwise I wouldn't have. The alternative for me would be to live totally selfishly and "to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" which seems to be the philosophy of much of our world. Is that your philosophy? Under what principles do you live your life? How do you make sense of it all?

I would even go so far as to say that if, when I die, there's absolutely nothing there but a vast chasm of empty space and an eternity of silence I still wouldn't regret how I've lived my life and the God I've chosen to believe in because it's given me a reason for living and the strength to bring forgiveness, hope and love into seemingly hopeless, loveless and irredeemable situations.

So, no, the Christian faith won't give you all the answers but it will give you the strength to live with the questions to which there are no earthly answers.

We shouldn't forget that Jesus died with an agonising question on His lips "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And look what happened to Him three days later! Mind you, it's all a question of what you choose to believe.

May you have the strength or rather the necessity to find a God to believe in and to try and make sense of this seemingly senseless world.

With every blessing.....

Peter

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