

‘Even the Hairs’ - a Sermon by Michael Palmer, 21/6/2020

‘And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.’ Matthew 10:30

When Jesus declared this statement he was speaking about God who is beyond our mortal existence. (Mt.10:28) A God who is responsible for the immeasurable expanse of space. Eternal. Almighty.

A God for whom heaven is throne and earth a footstool! BIG.

A God who commands the morning, walks in the recesses of the deep, brings rain, sends lightning, numbers clouds, births mountains, and on whose wisdom hawks soar!

Jesus says that this enormous and busy God knows the hairs of your head and cares for you!

This is a beautiful reality of the Christian faith

A reality which is both very comforting and very puzzling!

And, I might add, ridiculous & incomprehensible to me. Well incomprehensible when separated from the Jesus event - his birth, his sayings and miracles and his encounters with people, his death and resurrection. To use an analogy - When I see or feel ripples in a pond - I know that something has broken the surface - the ripples are a reality which tell of a more intense reality - the Breaking In. I believe that God knows and cares for me NOW - I have confidence in this because Jesus has ‘broken in’ on our ‘pond’ showing enormous love - and that love and care continue to impact - as ripples on a pond.

Our core starting point for appreciating a God who knows us and cares for us must be Jesus. Especially if we would want to exalt the God who loves and cares for us before the skeptics of the world.

A very public example of how a wrong starting point, to appreciate the care of God for us, can bring dishonour to God is the story behind and the song sung by Tim Minchin called ‘ Thank you, God’.

The song was composed after Minchin had an encounter with a young Christian man, who was full of enthusiasm to share the love of God with Minchin. Sam, the christian, wanted Tim to see that the hidden God can be knowable. Sam began by stating that as we believe in Love who we cannot see, so in like fashion, we may be able to believe in God which we cannot see. Tim rightly indicated that in his experience ‘love’ can be seen. Love is seen by the actions of others

Now this is where Sam stumbled in his witness - for rather than highlighting the rock which is Jesus to show God’s love - he went direct to a beautiful edge of the pond ripple moment

Sam - shared with Tim of a beautiful ripple moment where God healed his mum of an incurable lens degeneration - a severe cataract.

And I thank God for Tim Minchin’s severe response. It was sadly deserved. For Minchin was left wondering what sort of God would fix Sam’s mum’s cataract but seemed indifferent to the Starving masses? Unmoved by the inequality between the various classes? thoughtless to the aids ridden African nations and absent for the Victims of plague or flood addled Asians....

If ‘the beautiful ripples’ of how God continues to work in our lives is ‘the best’ we have to offer as proof that God loves - knows and cares about us (even the hairs of our heads) then we have shone a light on the door handle when what I really wanted to see was the keyhole!

How do I know that there is a God who cares about the hairs on my head and who is worth following now, and who keeps us safe beyond the grave? We can know of God’s love because of Jesus. [Note - there is no promise of material, wellness or relational safety with Jesus in this life - the passages today state that God knows even the hairs of your head - but as life here unfolds - there will be mocking, alienation, suffering and even death. See Mat.10:24-39]

So let me try and hurry us along

I hold God loves us because of Jesus. A man who lived in time and space. A person who lived and spoke beauty, whose compassion demanded imitation, who seemed the intersection of the timeless and time, who fulfilled ancient prophecy. God in Christ showed his love in action. That is how love is known. I believe in God, and that God loves us - because Jesus appeared alive after death - a resurrection testified by hundreds of eyewitnesses. And 'just as Christ was raised from death by the glory of God, I believe, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)

You see God who is sovereign - of creation and eternity - cares for us. I know this because of Jesus. God showed love by action and God asks the church to show that love by loving action.

God cares for the big things - for when Jesus walked among us - his miracles showed that God was interested to push back hunger, disease, community brokenness, alienation and death (Minchin's concerns) And in so doing God gives us our focus of engagement in the world as Stewart Headlam, the 19th century Christian Socialist, wrote of Jesus and his followers [the church], "Jesus did not merely declaim against greed and unnatural suffering: He deliberately founded a society [church] to keep doing, throughout the world on a large scale, what He began to do by way of example, in miniature, in Palestine."

When the Rock which is Christ was cast into time and history - it set off ripples - **Big ripples** - for Jesus lived and died and rose to break down the wall of hostility between us and God - he brought peace with God. We proclaim that beautiful splash

Big ripples - for as we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus - we walk in his footsteps of love. Do we want others to see God's loves? Then point to Jesus - for, once again, there is God's love made known, and then live out that generous love to others. As we live so then others will see the 'ripple-out' effect of God's love in action. The beautiful edge of the pond ripples.

So, if God knows the number of the hairs on our head will he not also be interested in the minutia of our lives? Will God know of, be concerned about, and both cure and inspire the curing of the like of cataracts? Might we give thanks to God for little acts of kindness as answered prayer? I say Yes - because Love is known by actions, and mostly this love is shown as we care for one another in the little things of life - not just the big! Would we diminish God, away from us, to only the 'God of the big'?

Let me conclude with a quote from Thieliicke 'Our human life consists mostly in trifles; of headaches or good humour, of fatigue or vitality, of our colleagues' pleasantness or lack of it, of good luck in shopping or bad luck in letting a swearword slip out. If a world war [or pandemic] is not threatening, I am more interested in the local section of the newspaper Even the possible threat of atomic war [or climate disaster] where the lives of millions of people hanging in the balance doesn't agitate us primarily because (lets be honest!), we are [more] fearful for those committed to our care, for our property, for our hometown, and ultimately ourselves. Thus the small and the personal [often] determine our life.'

God can become my Lord only when God is with me in the hundreds of little things which make up my life. For just this reason it is indescribably comforting that Jesus and his Father are not to be found exclusively in the immense cosmic structure. It is good to know that we should not confine our prayers to something so sublime as the 'Kingdom of God', but that we might also come with the request for daily bread'or cataracts and if love is known by her actions - and God be love - in the big & the small - lets see God there present, and be there loving as Jesus has led the way - a costly, other person centred love - a take up your cross sort of love.

Lets pray!

Our Father, who art in heaven