Sunday 16th July 2023

Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

‘…to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace’. Romans 8: 1-11

My friends, todays scripture includes one of the most enduring images of the gospel in the parable of ‘the sower and the seed’. This environmental metaphor is as resonant today as it was in His more agrarian time and even more urgent now since our environment is being ‘scorched’ and our ‘soil’ quickly squandered.

Christ Our Lord taught his flock with a frustration similar to that experienced by modern scientists. ‘Let anyone with ears, listen’ He says. Climate change scientists have been denied for decades. Our human ears have been blocked to reality – and so the ears of wheat and corn which could still be abundant by ‘…one hundred fold’ are instead ‘withering away’, and we know that with that withering will come unbearable suffering for millions of people.

The urgency of the climate crisis cannot be underestimated. It can no longer be denied. The data is compelling. We have only one blue planet – one oasis in our solar system. Despite billions spent by those with vested interests in spreading doubt, the facts are clear. There is no ‘Planet B’. We must restore the earth- and the only doubt is whether we have the will to do it?

One of our difficulties remains our lack of faith. We have been told for decades that faith in God has been declining (at least in the ‘Global North’) but until now it was not recognised that belief in science is also declining. Recent research has shown that faith in science is as low in many parts of the world as belief in religion.

St Paul’s counsel is different and it is liberating. He encourages us to ‘set our minds on the spirit’. By the spirit he means the source of Wisdom, and of Understanding, Right Judgement and Courage, Knowledge, Reverence, Wonder and Awe. None of these is alien to our science or contrary to reality. All of these require energy however we approach them but St Paul is right when he says that we need to re-set the mind first on the spirit as the route to ‘life and peace’.

His view is also consistent with aspects of today’s cognitive neuroscience. The process of changing our ‘mindset’ or ‘reframing’ (as we like it to call it) is an essential first step on the path to recovery. The environmental challenges of our age require such a change of ‘mindset’ but what will this reframed faith look like in our age of ‘unbelief’? Surely it will be very different from the past.

The work of sociologist Mary Leamy\* is helpful in this regard. She studied the common features of recovery in some of the most challenged clinical services. Her data shows that all effective initiatives can be described using one simple acronym; ‘CHIME’. That is C-H-I-M-E.

Restoration in cancer care or addiction services for example requires initiatives that ‘CHIME’. The data tells us that in order to restore wellbeing such care must be ‘Connected, and Hopeful, have integrity and respect for Identity. It must be Meaningful and it must be Empowered’. Services that CHIME in these ways are successful and when they help individuals to CHIME for themselves they can restore the spirit of wellbeing.

Our people – especially our young people - are beginning to despair of climate renewal but this is a mistake. Through 40 years of clinical practice I have seen many examples of recovery – and I have witnessed many in despair. I have also witnessed countless journeys back to life and away from the darkest melancholy. Although each person is unique and no two ways to wellbeing are the same, the reality is that restoration of life and peace is possible especially when our initiatives CHIME.

Many of us will have differing perspectives and even conflicting ideas and this diversity is good, but we are at a moment of existential crisis. Now whatever our views, it is time to re-connect with each other and despite our differences to restore our faith in the belief that together we can repair our world.

And so as Christians we begin by remembering to pray,

‘Come, O Holy Spirit,

Fill the hearts of Thy faithful

And kindle in them the fire of Thy love.

Send forth Thy Spirit

And they shall be created.

And Thou shalt renew

The face of the earth.’

Amen.

Ends.

*\*from ‘*A whole new plan for living- Achieving balance and wellness in a changing world’. By Jim Lucey. Published by Hachette Ireland