

The Meaning We Each Need

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 7/28/19
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Waunakee, WI

*What's it all about, Alfie
Is it just for the moment we live
What's it all about when you sort it out, Alfie
Are we meant to take more than we give
Or are we meant to be kind*

These are the opening lyrics to the theme song of the 1966 movie, *Alfie*, starring Michael Caine and Shelly Winters.

Alfie is a young man from the working classes of London. He is charming, totally self-centered, and very successful with the ladies. Alfie “uses” them for his immediate pleasure without any emotional regard for them. He is downright callous toward them and at the same time believe he causes no harm to them. It is only toward the end of the film that he begins to understand the consequences of this lifestyle.

The eternal search for meaning and understanding is what makes us human; it the proof of our being made in the image and likeness of God.

Why do we do this? Why do we ask questions for which there is either no answer or too many answers? Asking these questions – the big questions – forms our understanding of who we are and why we are here. It determines who we become and why we live our lives the way we do.

My perspective on life was created by many influences: parents, Jane, Sunday School Teachers, teachers at every point in my life, colleagues in ministry, parishioners and churches to which I’ve been appointed, to make only a partial list.

Today, Paul is introducing Jesus – or reintroducing Jesus – to these Christians in Colossae. Paul is saying that it’s easy to get this stuff wrong. He said that there are bogus versions of Jesus. These are what he calls “empty deceits.”

These things that promise us the moon. Paul says, “I want to show you something better and this is the real Jesus; not the Jesus of the televangelists or the Jesus of the preachers of some ideology or other.

This whole idea of who Jesus is made me think of C.S. Lewis’ book, *Mere Christianity*. Originally, *Mere Christianity* wasn’t a book. It was a series of radio messages given on the BBC during World War II. Picture people in London having the snot bombed out them, trying to listen to the wireless, huddled in an underground tube station.

Lewis says, “A man who is merely a man and says the sorts of things that Jesus said would not be a great, moral teacher; he would either be a lunatic on the level of the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God or else he’s a mad man or something worse.”

See, Jesus has an agenda. Jesus was a real guy. He was God come in the flesh. He cared for people. He touched all the people that everybody else wanted to exclude. Jesus gave words of hope to people that nobody else cared about.

And Jesus finally showed us that he was divine by – and this is so counter-cultural – so counter-intuitive – Jesus showed us who God was be being crucified.

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By the way, the whole reason the Romans crucified people was to make a point to any potential troublemakers. If you get out of line or offer treasonous words or actions and this could be the result. Stay in line. The other thing they wanted to say is that Rome is in control; Rome is all-powerful.

You know how communities have signs such as “Welcome to Waunakee?” Well Rome may have had 25 crucifixions on the Appian Way coming into Rome or into another city. You get the idea!

I like what Paul does with this. Jesus on the one hand appears to be the victim of Rome. But what Paul says is that when he was crucified, Jesus exposed the Romans for who they really were and they really were a power where the haves had more, and the have-nots suffered, and nobody cared about it.

And the way Jesus defeated them on the cross was not by coming down from cross somehow and doing high-fives. Instead, from the cross, Jesus loved them. He forgave them. He had mercy on them.

Jesus looks at all the powers of the world; all our talk about might and strength, all our snarling at one another and on the cross Jesus looks down at us and he has mercy; he has love.

Paul goes on to say this. If you have received Jesus, then live in him. The word translated “live in him” is also translated as to walk, as in to “Walk in Jesus.”

What we do together in worship sends us out to “walk in him” in our daily lives. Jesus may be honored by what we do here, but he is also interested in what we do when we exit this place.

You see, I think Paul was very interested in how we present the faith to those whom we meet his week. For example, I can get a little exasperated on the South Beltline when I need to be somewhere. It’s easy to get impatient. It’s easy to get upset at the slow pace of traffic. And it would be so easy to misrepresent who I am as a follower of Christ at that point.

And it’s not just that. It seems as though we are all hunkering down in our own little silos of information from cable TV networks and internet sources – especially as we enter a new election season.

Right now, people fear others because they are different. A person can get caught up in that. And they have. And they do.

So how are we supposed to walk around in the Spirit of Jesus?

I like the way a friend of C. S. Lewis put it in a letter to him: *“You are to be nailed, nailed to Christ’s will. The nails that hold you are God’s commandments; your rules for living, your prayers, your confession, Holy Communion, serving others, expressing gratitude. Let us honor these nails for Christ’s sake and pray that by the virtue of his passion they may hold fast.”*

And so, dear friends, we trudge along on the dusty road of discipleship. We trudge along, carrying all the mistakes and imperfections that make us human. But somehow we walk in confidence, knowing the peace of God that has been poured out upon us through the Holy Spirit.

And even when we stumble over our imperfections and fall flat on our faces, the loving arms of God will pick us up and put us back on the road, because we have been made good enough to deserve God’s care. Indeed, in the loving sight of God, *good enough is good enough*. Thanks be to God!