Why Are We Alive?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

At the beginning of every academic year we try to deal with the basic questions of life, particularly the most basic one of all "why are we here?" "Why are we alive?" Through the year it is obvious that we as a group believe that the Christian explanation of reality is the true one. But there are reasons why we believe that. So at the beginning of every academic year we try to look at those reasons. Do you remember about three weeks ago we felt that the first question you ought to deal with when you're dealing with the whole issue of why we're alive is; "Is there anybody who originated the whole thing who might be able to give us some clue as to why he put us here"?

We dealt there with the question "Is there a God?" You remember that we concluded with people like Einstein and Darwin that that is the most reasonable explanation for the existence of our world, of the universe, the order and design in our world and the universe and particularly the most reasonable explanation of us, personable people that we are. Particularly of the existence of our conscience within us that is always making us want to be better than we actually are.

Then you remember that two weeks ago we dealt with the whole question "What is this God like if he exists"? We talked about the various sources of information on that that we have in the Greek and Roman myths in the eastern religions; Buddhism, Mohammedism, and Confucianism. We came to the conclusion that intellectually none of them had the kind of information that we have in this collection of books called the Bible -- because all the other religions are based on the subject of personal opinions of a man or of a woman as to what God is like. This collection of

books contains historical records of what our creator did and said over 2,000 to 4,000 years of history. We concluded that the Bible had some of the most reliable history compared with that of the ancient writings that we have in our world.

Now you remember then last week we tried to deal with the incredible information that is included in the last quarter of that book. The information about a human being like ourselves who lived for about 33 or 35 years in Galilee and who kept on saying that he was alive with God the creator before the universe was made. He kept on saying that he was really the son of our maker. He was our creator living here on earth.

You remember that we examined critically, I think, that claim last week. We talked about the fact that he doesn't have the marks of derangement and imbalance in his life that maniacs or lunatics have. Indeed he is looked upon as the pattern of a balanced life.

We talked about his sinlessness and the fact that he had power over nature and power over disease. You may remember, finally we talked about the incredible event of the Resurrection. So that in spite of there being many imitations of resurrection and many experiences of controlled breathing and people being buried alive and pretending that he came alive again, there is no event so substantiated as the resurrection of Jesus. It stands unchallenged after more stringent and more demanding legal and sociological and historical analysis and examination than any other event.

So you remember last Sunday we said that if any man is the son of the maker of the universe it is this man Jesus. It's reasonable to believe that this man is who he said he was. Really what I would ask you to do this Sunday is to look at him and ask what he told us about our lives and about reality. Loved ones if you conclude intellectually that he is God's son do you see that you

have no alternative but to do what he says? It's just good common sense.

So once you take that step and say he is the son of God you can't hold back from the next step which is obviously, let me find out what he wants me to do. Because you know that's what you'd do if I said that. If I said to you, "I am the son of our maker. I existed with the creator that made you before the universe was ever created. I know why we're here. My father has explained it all to me" -- you know you would say, "Tell me -- what does your father think of me? Explain to me what should I do with my life? What's the meaning of it all?"

That's what I'd ask us just to listen to today. Jesus' own explanation of what life is about. I have not found any better terms than the terms that we've shared before. Jesus said very plainly first of all, all of you are not going to last more than 70 or at the most 80 years. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." You have a mind and you have emotions and a body. Jesus said they are not going to last beyond 70 or 80 years. You're not going to stay alive any longer than the parents or the grandparents that gave you that mental and physical life, you're not.

Of course our reason reinforces that. You are more dead now than you were when I started this sentence. You are. There are millions of cells in you that have died even since I started that sentence. You maybe plead, "Oh, but aren't there others being renewed?" Yes, but fewer than are dying. You come to that point in life and believe me you're all past it, when you're losing more than you're gaining. You can see the signs of it in graying hair and wrinkles and in pains where you didn't have pains before.

Jesus said it's all proof that you're not going to last forever in your present state. Your mental and physical life is already dying.

Then he said a strange thing: you just won't believe that. That's what he said once. He said they will not believe that; you just won't believe that. You refused to believe it because there's something inside you that says no, no I wasn't made to stay here for 70 or 80 years and go out like a light, I wasn't. I was made to last longer than that. There is something in us, isn't it, it's strange. That our reason opposes it but there's something in us that feels we were made to last longer than that. We will not believe Jesus' words that our present mental and physical life won't last longer than that.

So of course we fight against it. You know we do. We feel, no we're made to experience, we don't even know the word eternity. We feel it's like that. We're made to live forever. We're made to experience the security of eternity. We're made here to experience the safety and security of eternity. We're made to experience the stability of eternity. No, somehow we're not made to be fiddlers on a roof. Yet you know all of us feel we are.

Wall Street shakes and we all shake. Iran stops exporting oil and we all run scared. We know that there's great uncertainty in this life. We feel it ourselves. We feel it in our own waywardness and our own lack of tenacity. So you know what we do? We try to get that stability. We try to get that security. We try to take the attributes of a purely temporary mental and physical life and we try to parlay them into the attributes of life as we think it should be.

So you know what happens. We get the education and we try to exchange the degree for the best job possible. Not so that we can serve humanity most of us or so that we can make the world a better place, but so that we can get more money so that we can live with some kind of stability and some kind of security.

Then you know as the years pass we try to trade up our cars and our houses to somehow try to get some security into our life and some sense of stability. Then we try to get the best life insurance and medical package that we can, hoping that somehow we will be able to guard against these uncertainties that make life so shaky and uncertain. Then we try to get a good position in our jobs. We try to establish a position as to where those underneath us can't undermine us. We try to establish our stability in relationship to our colleagues or against the interest of our rivals. So of course life becomes a very anxious process because you're always trying to make yourself stable and secure.

However far we go in that we are always haunted by that figure with the haggard face, the long hair and the beard who was carried out of that hotel room and then died on the way to the hospital. We are haunted by that character because, of all people, Howard Hughes did it better than any of us. He did it better. He owned more millions than we will probably ever own. He did more to establish security and stability and eternity here on earth than anybody could and that we will probably ever do. Yet at the end he found he couldn't protect himself against the bacteria and the weaknesses that show us that we are only temporarily here.

You know it's the same with the whole business of happiness. Somehow we feel we were made for an eternal experience. We feel we were made for the serenity, the peace and the exhilaration of eternity. We feel that somehow we should experience that serenity and peace of Walden Pond and then it should be combined with all the wild excitement of the Arabian Nights. Somehow it should be possible to get a south sea island where we could feel all that. So we try to feel it. You know we do. We try to use experiences and try to use relationships to somehow extract from life that mixture of wild excitement and a great serenity and peace that we feel we were made for.

Yet however many relationships we use, however many people we prostitute, however many experiences we try to produce, however how much we try to calm our anxiety chemically, yet at the end of it all we are left with a sense of emptiness and loneliness. Instead of the sense of conviviality and excitement and exhilaration that we think we should have, we're left with a kind of anticlimax and you might almost say a sense of desolation instead of the happiness and excitement of eternity.

It is the same with who we are. I don't know that there's one of us here that doesn't feel a bit like Milton, you know, that we were born for some great thing. We do. We feel it deep down, don't we? Every one of us. You see, you think you're the only one that feels it. The person beside you feels it. You think you're more individual than me but you're not. I feel I'm more individual than you. We all feel the same. We all feel we are very different and we all have different little twists that make us special. We feel we are special and we are significant and we are important and somebody must know we're here. Somebody must know that we passed through this vale of tears. Somebody must know what we've done. Somebody, somewhere, somehow must know us, ourselves. Yet we have a terrible feeling that nobody does.

The gold watch on retirement day is a kind of sweet sorrow thing. We joke about it yet we have a funny feeling that's probably all we'll mean to those that we work with over 30 or 40 years.

We are kind of surprised that however much we try to will ourselves into positions of importance, it never lasts. We try to will ourselves into a place of importance. We try to will other people to recognize us and look to us and think of us. We throw our weight around at home. We throw our weight around at the office. We exercise our authority in ways we ought not to in order to try to get somebody to notice us, somebody to realize we are

somebody. Yet after it's all done we're kind of surprised at how quickly they've forgotten John Wayne. He was pretty famous. How quickly they forget Bing Crosby. How quickly they forget Jack Benny. How quickly they forget John F. Kennedy and we're not nearly as well known as them. You wonder, well how will we become known?

Loved ones, what Jesus said was don't you see you're trying the impossible. The life that you've got now is not eternal life and you're trying to make it into eternal life by your own efforts and you can't do it. The mental and physical life that you have is going to die and be finished and go into a grave after 70 or 80 years. That's it. It will just be a name on a gravestone and nothing better than that. That's all you'll receive. What you're trying to do is somehow to take the attributes of what is a purely temporal life and you're trying to make them into the attributes of eternal life.

You can't get blood out of a stone because a stone is not alive. You can't extract from a dead inanimate thing like mental and emotional life the life blood that makes life eternal. However much you try. Of course all most of us have succeeded in trying is making ourselves into monsters. That's what we do. We pervert ourselves into egotistical hedonistic monsters that are domineering and manipulating all the time.

Of course what Jesus says is, you see those feelings that you have, those aspirations, those feelings that you should have the security of an eternity? Those feelings that there is a happiness beyond what you've experienced? Those feelings that you have that you should be able to break out of the earth bound existence that you're in? Those feelings are there because that's right, that's true. You were made to live forever. You were made to be important. You were made to be happy beyond your dreams. You were made not to have to fear whether Iran cuts off the oil or

whether you lose your job. You were made for eternity. That's what Jesus says.

He says it's a gift. It's a gift. You have this body, this physical life. And inside it you have your psychological being, your mind and emotions and your will. Inside that again, if you can talk about inside at all in regard to this subject, you have spirit. You have a part of you that is sending up all those aspirations. That spirit is at the moment dead. That's why you feel such emptiness. The reason you can't feel it is that you are trying to get at it from a mental, emotional and physical level and you can't.

What Jesus said was the only way that spirit can come alive and give life to your mind and emotions and to your body so that you live forever is, if the person who made you brings that spirit of yours alive by the action and the energizing of his own eternal life.

That's the only way it will ever come about. Jesus said that's a gift. That gift of life from my Father is something that God has to give you. When he gives you it everything comes alive inside you. Your mind and emotions begin to work right. Your body begins to operate right. You stop trying to squeeze out of people and other things life. You begin to have life inside. You begin to sense the real joy of the love of the one significant other in the whole universe. That he is your own personal Father. That he knows your name and that he has put you here for a special purpose. You begin to sense your identity in this universe. You begin to feel most of all of course that he will not see you go down in the dirt. That he will be right there every moment whatever Iran does or whatever the stock market does.

Jesus said this is a gift but the Father will give it only to those of us who cannot and will not find it elsewhere. That's what Jesus said -- that you can't serve God and mammon. That you can't be

going to establish your version of security by exercising your greed and exercising your covetousness and trying to gather around yourself all the little nuts and stocks and shares that you possibly can to hedge your bets. You can't do that. You can't be grabbing at every human being you want to try to have an exciting experience of exhilaration with them whatever it costs them. You can't do that. You can't be domineering others and be requiring them to respect you and exercising your pride and your envy and your domination over them. You can't be getting that kind of thing from this world and also expect God to give you real eternal life. Jesus said it's either one or the other.

Many of us I know say well, I want to do that. I really do. I want to trust God as my Father for my security. I do. But when the bank balance goes down there's a little fear goes through me. I want to trust him but I do find myself grabbing at other ways to rectify that. I do want to enjoy God. I see what a beautiful morning he's made this morning. I want to enjoy him. He must be brighter than the sunshine. I want to know him. I do. But I find that when I can get some quick thrill or quick exhilaration or quick happiness from a human being I find there is something inside me that goes that way.

Jesus said that's right. You as you are at the moment can do nothing else but try to get eternal life from this temporal life. Your present personality has become so perverted that it can do nothing else.

Why do you think I died? I didn't die just to bribe God to overlook your sins. That's not why I died. I died to express the miracle that my Father worked in eternity for you. He foresaw the way you would develop. He took that perverted personality of yours and he put it into me in eternity. He destroyed it there. That's what we were both expressing on Calvary.

Your old self was crucified actually with me but crucified with me indeed in eternity. You have a whole new personality from my Father's hand that can be activated at this very moment if you believe me. This personality that comes from my Father and comes from my resurrection is able to trust God for security. This new personality is able to be satisfied with my Father's friendship even if it is friendship from no other human being. This personality is satisfied with the importance that it receives from my Father's attention. This personality can come alive in you this very day if you are willing to turn from seeking these things from the world. Stop trying to manufacture your own version of eternal life and I will make real in you a personality that can receive eternal life from my Father.

That's why Jesus said you really have to be born again. You have a mental and physical life that you got when you were born the first time but your spirit needs to come alive. You need to be born again. There's a new version of you that can be born in you this day.

Loved ones, that's what Jesus says. That you ought to analyze and you ought to think and you ought to use your critical faculties. But after all that is done what is needed is a complete change in you, a complete new birth. A new person has to be created in you. Jesus said that that's possible because of the destruction of the old person in his death and the fact that when he arose from the dead God resurrected the whole human race new and created it new. There is a personality of yours that is available to you that is able to know God as its own friend and Father.

Loved ones, actually all you need to do is believe that and turn away from your version of eternal life. If you say to me, you mean no savings? No stocks and shares? No friends? Sure you know I don't mean that. Jesus had those things. Jesus had

friends. Jesus had a coat. He had shoes. Sure you need some of those things. You know fine well what we're talking about. We're talking about when you go beyond that and you begin to try to get your security from those things. Or you depend on your friends for your happiness. That's where it's wrong.

Jesus says if you will stop doing that and you will do what I do which is look to my Father for the only life that I ought to have. And I was content with whatever life he gave me and didn't ask for more than he was willing to give me. If you will do that then his Spirit will come into yours and make you alive to him. That's why you're here on earth. Loved ones, that's why we're here.

If I could just say even to those who are college people -- it goes quickly. It does. It's amazing. It goes fast. It just seems yesterday that I thought I was 17 and I had gone up to the University. I thought I had all the time in the world to get this thing sorted out. That honestly seems like yesterday. So the rest of us will say the same thing. It goes very fast. Of course none of us can tell how long we have really. None of us can tell how long we have to think about these things.

Then could I just say this to you? I know some of my dear friends who were thinking about it when they were 17. They are still thinking about it. It's very interesting to see those of us who hear about it for the first time and respond immediately we come through and we live that way. But, those of us who hear about it and decide to think about it or to wait for a more convenient season, we're still standing at the railway station in the same place 40 years later.

So be wise, will you? Don't think that you have forever. You haven't. You have 70 or at the most 80 years. Probably now you have at the most 30 or 40 years. Who knows whether you do have 30 or 40 years? The reason you're here and I'm here on

earth is to get to know this dear maker of ours and to allow his spirit to make our spirits alive so that we can live with him forever. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for Jesus, for the unbelievable pain that he was willing to bear. We thank you for your love for us. Lord we want to be real with you this morning. Father we do see that much of our attempt at imitating eternity has come to nothing in our own lives and has in a sense made us incapable even of ordinary life. Lord we see the truth that you have set before us during your lifetime. That there is only one place to receive life that goes on forever and that has a quality of eternity as well as a quantity. That is from our Maker who originally gave us this temporal life.

So Father we would turn to you and we would ask you to show us what we need to turn from in order to receive your gift of a spirit and to be made alive to you and to begin to know you and begin to relate to you. Father show us where we have to stop doing certain things so that we can come alive in your Holy Spirit. We ask you our Father to work with us as we think and pray this through. We ask you most of all to make it real to us by the power of your Spirit. Lord Jesus we would welcome you in as the person that you are and as our dear friend and our Savior. We would give our lives to you now and we would expect you to give us directions each day so that we may be what you and your Father made us to be.

We now commit ourselves to you Lord as you committed your life for us. We commit ours to you for your glory and for your service. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.