

Awareness of God 1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Usually on these Sunday mornings we study the book of Romans. But last Sunday we finished chapter 14 and I just sensed that God wanted us to share some things that concern a lot of us. It's this. Don't you think that many of us have very little awareness of God through the week? I mean don't you think that many of us here have very little feeling that God is close to us, Monday through Friday? You can be going through your day at work and there are many of us who really don't even think of God. We certainly don't feel that He is very close to us.

We feel it on Sunday here when we worship. Or I think all of us feel it at funerals or at significant crisis moments in our lives. But through the ordinary workday week many of us don't have very much sense that God is really there or is really alive. It's strange when you think of it because I don't know that any of us have any doubt that he's there. I don't think any of us have any doubt that He exists. You know that's what that piece that we read in Job made clear, and maybe you'd look at it. It's Job 38:25.

Job 38:25-29 "Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert on which there is no man; to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass. Has the rain a Father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?" I think all of us kind of feel that.

I mean there's no doubt God is there even if you believe in evolution. There had to be some intelligent mind that programmed simple to complex development. And so all of us feel whether we believe in creation or evolution, yeah there has to be a God, there must be somebody here who made all this that we see around us. It can't come by time plus chance. Someone must have made it and actually we feel even more than that. We feel that for us, whether we're religious or not, there is something greater than this earth.

It's interesting you know, it doesn't matter how irreligious you are or how little you believe, all of us feel there's something greater than this earth for us. I'll show you there's a verse in one of the Old Testament books that states it very well. It's Ecclesiastes 3:11.

Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He (that is, God) has made everything beautiful in it's time; also, He has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." It's amazing isn't it because it's so true for all of us. God has put eternity into man's mind. We all talk down the guy who goes off on drugs and decides to leap off the high building but actually we all feel we want to do something like that. From the moment we buy our first motorbike to the moment we buy that high-powered car, we're always trying to give vent to that feeling that we have, that we're made for eternity in some way. Actually, that's why we men are often so disappointed. We slog and slog and slog and you climb the ladder and then you get there and it isn't like what you've been yearning for. Because actually that was just a poor shadow of the eternity that God has put into our minds.

So all of us, most of us believe that there's a God and most of us actually believe that we're made for something more than this earth and yet through our workday world we don't sense very much of God's presence. In fact there are other things that follow if God really exists and one of them is

stated just a few chapters later in Job 34:21.

Job 34:21, "For His eyes are upon the ways of a man, and He sees all his steps." Actually you and I could make that logical conclusion without it being stated in the Bible. If God exists and if He has made everything, then in fact it's true. His eyes are upon the ways of a man and He sees all his steps. There's no question that must be true.

If we can put a camera up in one of our satellites that is actually powerful enough to read the page of the Minneapolis Tribune that you are holding down on Hennepin Avenue (and that's true), if we can do that then obviously God sees all your steps. He sees every step that you take. He sees every thought that you think. He hears every word that you say. He sees everything you do.

Many of us believe that and yet it's strange we still don't feel that God is very close to us through the day. We don't feel very sensitive to His presence and yet we know in our minds, "Yes I know. God is omniscient. He must see all my steps. He knows everything I do." And yet we don't replicate that. We don't give back to Him that kind of closeness. We know He sees us but we don't have the sense that we know exactly what He's thinking of us and what He wants us to do.

In fact the Bible goes a bit further. It says not only that God exists and not only that He can see all our steps but it says something else and it's an amazing thing in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." It's unbelievable but true, that if God has planned and designed a purpose for everything from the smallest insect that keeps the balance of nature to the largest star in our constellation, then He obviously has a plan that is designed especially for you. He has works that He has prepared beforehand that you should walk in.

So you're not just here trying to hack it out for yourself or trying to find a way to occupy yourself in this world. God actually knows why He put you here and He has a plan for you. Yet isn't it amazing that many of us believe those things: God exists, God can see every step I take, God has my whole life planned and organized so that all I have to do is follow it if I am willing. Yet during the day many of us don't have great awareness of God in our lives, isn't it true?

We don't have a tremendous sense of awareness that He is there. We can't feel Him. We can't sense Him. We don't know what He is thinking about. We aren't very aware of Him, that's just it and yet we know all this -- that He is looking at every step. He is watching every step and He knows the next step that we should take and yet we ourselves are not very aware of Him. In fact, do you not think we're a bit with God like we are with a coach or an old school teacher that finds us doing something that they wouldn't approve of?

I mean, we may see them across the store or we may see them across the restaurant but we know they wouldn't approve of what we're doing and so we evade their glance, look away and pretend that we didn't see them. Is this lack of awareness of God not connected with that kind of feeling? We know He sees us but frankly, we'd rather He didn't. We know He can see everything we're doing, everything we're thinking and everything we're saying, but really we wish He didn't and so we are kind of evasive.

We deliberately avoid the thought that He's there. And is it not true that we engage in a willing deception that God can't actually see me every moment. He isn't with me every moment. As we engage in that deception and that evasion and that kind of guilt that we feel that we're actually avoiding

Him and we're not being direct with Him and clean with Him, we then begin to sense a great separation between Him and us. And that's why we feel that distance from Him through the day. Because we're actually evading Him in our hearts about the way we live our lives. And so intellectually, we know it's all true. God is there. He sees all our steps. He has everything planned. But in our hearts, our consciences, our emotions, and our spirits, we are actually engaged in evading Him. We evade His eyes because we know we aren't actually like Him and there are a thousand ways in which we know we are offending Him.

So because of that, we have this kind of evasiveness. This book you know puts it very well if you look at it, it's in Psalm 24:3. "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up His soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully." We kind of know that.

I mean we know inside our conscience, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in holy place." We know in our conscience that only those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not lift up their soul to what is false and do not swear deceitfully, can look into God's eyes. But we know, "I am not like that. I do swear deceitfully and I do lift up my soul to what is false and I don't have a pure heart and my hands are not clean." And so there witnesses within our conscience a sense that we can't afford to look straight into God's eyes.

So we can look into everybody else's eyes during the day but this dear Father who shines the sun upon us all day long, we can't look into His eyes. And so it's like we walk under Him, with Him looking at us. We say, "Yes, I see you Lord." It's really that kind of a half-and-half attitude we have during the day and it prevents us having a great sense of His presence in our lives. We would say, "Yes, we swear deceitfully but there are a lot of other things we do that we know He doesn't like." They're there in Matthew 5 if you want to look at it. I think loved ones this explains some of the discomfort that many of us have in having an open attitude of trust and confidence to the One who created us.

Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." And we just know we're not very meek at times. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." We know the saints do, and others do, but we don't feel we do. "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." Often we aren't merciful. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons of God."

Then when we get to, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We're persecuted for our own errors, our own mistakes. We're often paranoid, but we don't think of ourselves as people who would stand up for righteousness so that we are persecuted for it. There begins to come into our hearts, that awareness that, "I really am not very like God and I don't really see how He could have anything to do with me."

It goes on, if you look at it in Matthew 5:21, "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the counsel, and whoever says 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." That comes home to us as true and we sense, "Yes, God doesn't like that kind of person and I do get angry and I have said 'you fool' and how can God have anything to do with me if I am like that?"

Matthew 5:27-30, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to

you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." And you become aware, "Wait a minute, I have thought unclean thoughts. I have had angry feelings and I know God doesn't like that and so I don't see why He would have anything to do with me."

Of course you get into a "catch 22" because you say, "Well, I can't be close to God until I become like Him, and I can't become like Him until I get close to Him." Loved ones, is that not why many of us through the workaday world that we live in, Monday through Friday, have great difficulty feeling any awareness of God? It's connected up with our own attitudes, our own feeling of evasiveness and our own feeling that "Well, there's no other way. Let's face it. I am not what would please Him. I am not what He likes. He may love me but I don't see how He'd have anything to do with me. And I certainly haven't the confidence to go before Him."

It's a bit the same as when you do something wrong and then you try to approach your mother or your father or your colleague or your boss and there's just an uncertainty in your heart and a shakiness. You just haven't the confidence. You might say you haven't the faith to be open with him and therefore of course you miss all the fellowship and the friendship of that person. It's like that with many of us.

Here is what God says, "Forget your feelings. Forget your feelings. Forget what you're feeling about Me. Forget what you're feeling about yourself. Forget that. Stop thinking of those things. Let me tell you what I've done. Let me tell you what I've done for you. You, who are so dead and insensitive to Me, you, who have no feeling about Me, you, who are so dead to Me that you can't sense anything coming to you from me through the day, you, who can't feel what I am saying to you. Let Me tell you what I have done." Loved ones I'll show you.

Ephesians 2:4-8, "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." That's what God says. That's the Gospel.

God is saying to you this morning, "Forget your feelings. Before you had any feelings at all, before you ever had any thoughts about Me, when you were absolutely dead to Me, when you knew nothing about Me, I raised you up with sheer grace. I raised you up, made you alive in Jesus My Son and I've sat you beside me. I look upon you as My Son Jesus. That's the way I think of you. I think of you as My Son Jesus, and I will continue to think of you that way until the end of your life here on earth. That's the way I think of you. I don't look at all the anger in your heart. I don't look at all the misery of you. I don't look at all your greed and your envy. I don't look at your uncleanness. I have raised you up and made you sit with me in My Son Jesus and when I look upon you, I see you as part of My Son. It's me that has made you part of My Son. It's not you that have to make yourself part of My Son by some mystical experience. I have made you part of My Son and when I look at My Son, I see you and I love you the same way as I loved My Son."

You know if you say, "But how could you do that? I mean there's all this evil inside me. How could you think of me that way?" It's amazing what God did, loved ones.

It's in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. God allowed Jesus to bear your uncleanness. He allowed Jesus to bear your envy. He allowed Jesus to bear your impatience and your irritability. He allowed Jesus to bear your hatred and then God burned that out in Jesus and that's why He is prepared to take you into His own home at this very moment and has actually sat you already in His own home and is saying to you, "I have dealt with all those things that keep you evasive and keep you avoiding by glance. I have dealt with all those things. I have destroyed them in Jesus, My Son."

"Come on, this place has been available to you for generations. I've had a place for you beside me for years. Come on. Take it. Open your heart to Me. Treat Me as a Father who loves you and accepts you. Love Me back and let's begin to walk together." And the Bible says, "To anyone who does not work", that is, who does not work to try to make himself right with God but who believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, "his faith is counted as righteousness." And loved ones, if you believe that this morning, God regards your faith as righteousness and He accepts you not just as a good man, not just as a better man. I should show you what He accepts you as. It's in Romans 4:5.

Romans 4:5, "And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness." And it is the righteousness of God. God gives you His own righteousness. He does not accept you as a good man or as a better man or as a man or woman who is trying but He gives you the righteousness of God. He gives you His own righteousness.

Loved ones that's the Gospel--God has already changed you in Jesus and He treats you now as His own Son, as the apple of His own eye. He asks you to receive that and to love Him back and to begin to walk with Him day-by-day as His own dear child. Loved ones you have been changed. Everything that you have ever done in your life has been washed out and blotted out and destroyed in Jesus. It no longer exists in the Father's eyes. He has removed it as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed your transgressions from Him and He looks upon you as pure and holy like His Son Jesus. He wants you to accept that and believe that and begin to walk with Him day-by-day in your everyday life.

Brothers and sisters, you can do that this morning you know. Maybe you've never done it. Maybe you've never exercised faith that God has put you in His Son Jesus and has destroyed all the sin in your life in Him and has raised you up with Jesus to His right hand. Maybe you've never believed that. Believe it this morning. Jesus said, "Believe and repent and then turn from the things that God has shown you His Son has borne." But first believe. First believe that God has borne it.

Here's the amazing thing. For the dear girl in Pigalle Paris, who has just fornicated with somebody because she's a prostitute; Jesus bore her lust and her greed and bore the pain of it in His own body, whether she takes advantage of it or not. The guy that will murder somebody tonight in New York City (and there will be somebody); Jesus has already borne the infinite pain and agony of going to hell for that man's anger and hatred.

In other words, all those things have already been borne. They have already been destroyed. It is a lie that those loved ones believe that they still have to live that way. So it is with us. God has already destroyed all that is evil in you and He is saying, "Come on, believe that and come to me and live with me day-by-day in openness and trust and confidence. And your faith I will regard as righteousness and you will begin to sense a closeness to me that My Son alone shares."

Loved ones, that's the Father's will for you. So if you've never made that step, I'd encourage you to take it today. If you've never believed the Gospel and you've never repented and you've never seen that God has already raised you up with His Son and He already regards you as His Son Jesus and thinks of you that way, despite what you are, then believe it this morning. Chose to believe it this morning. Just take that step and believe it. And from that moment, God regards your faith as righteousness and He will begin to walk with you as a man walks with his friend, day-by-day. And Monday through Friday, you'll begin to sense the Father's presence in your life. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we would pray for each other this morning and pray especially for any loved one who has never seen that they are justified by grace through faith. We pray for anyone here who has never seen that they too have been made whole in Jesus. That Christ died for all therefore all, including them, died. And that You regard them as being like Your Son Jesus and You receive them to Yourself as You receive Your Son. And that their faith in what you've done is reckoned by you to be righteousness and you see them as being as righteous as Jesus.

Father, we would pray for each other this morning so that any of us who see that for the first time this day will now quietly take the step and confess our sins to You openly because You have borne them so graciously without any guarantee of any return on Your sacrifice and so we would confess our sins. We would confess them one-by-one in the silence just as we committed them one-by-one and we would no longer argue with You Lord about this thing or that thing. If there's anything doubtful, we would confess it now this day.

Then Father, Your Son said we should repent and believe the Gospel. We would repent of those sins and Lord Jesus when we see what you have borne on Calvary for us, we would put them far from us. We would play around with these ghosts no longer. We would put them from us. We would no longer make excuses about our wills. We know that you have destroyed the power of the will to oppose God and we would turn from it.

Then Father, we would believe the Gospel that because of Jesus' death you now regard us as being like your Son and because you have placed us in Him and raised us up to be with you at your right hand, that's where we really are this moment, and we are your dear friends and we can regard you as our dear Father. We thank you Lord for that, trust you for the Holy Spirit to enable us to live in that open confidence and trust throughout the days of our lives, in Jesus' name. Amen.