**Genesis 1:26-2:4**

**What is the meaning of your life?**

What is the meaning of life? Why are we here at all? What’s the point?

 It’s a question that has been at the heart of the human experience since the dawn of creation. But those of us who are old enough to remember the Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy already know the answer, of course. The Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything is…42.

 Yep, Douglas Adams gave us the answer in his 1978 Radio Show that became a book, and then a TV series in 1981 and a Computer Game in 1984 and a feature film in 2005. The answer to the meaning of life is 42.

 And bizarrely, there is now a whole scientific industry around why the answer is 42! Honestly, it’s true! And there are three key reasons why this scientific group believe the answer of Life to be 42 - although, not being a scientist, the logic of this is lost on me. First, the number 42 in Binary Code is 101010. Second, light refracts through water at 42 degrees to create a rainbow. Third, light requires 10 to the power of -42 seconds to cross the diameter of a proton. So, clearly, the number 42 is at the heart of the created order and must therefore be The Answer we are all searching for!

 But in 1993, Douglas Adams, the author of Hitchhikers’ Guide, gave an interview in which he told us why he chose the Number 42 and he said this: “The answer to this is very simple. It was a joke. It had to be a number, an ordinary, smallish number, and I chose that one. I sat at my desk, stared into the garden and thought ’42 will do’. I typed it out. End of story”.

 Oh dear. Maybe 42 isn’t the meaning of life and answer to everything after all. Perhaps we’d better look elsewhere and where better than the Bible and the creation story in Genesis 1.

 This week, as you will see from the leaflets in the pewsheet, we are beginning a series of sermons that will take us through the basics of the Christian faith from today to Advent Sunday in December, excluding Parade Sundays. We will be thinking about the nature of sin, what Jesus achieved when he died on the cross, what the resurrection is all about, who the Holy Spirit is, what the church is, what mission is, the Second Coming of Jesus and much more. By Advent Sunday we will have a complete picture of the Christian Story and how it all fits together.

 And we begin this Sunday by thinking about the primary question, which is simply this: Why did God create us in the first place? What is the meaning of life? Because if we know what the purpose of life is, what the meaning of life is, then we can adapt the way we actually live day to day so that we maximize our time here on earth and fulfill our potential, fulfill our destiny.

 So let’s look at our passage for today from Genesis 1, which, in the pew Bibles, you will find on page 1, right at the front…

 Before we get into the passage itself, I just want to make one observation about Genesis 1, which is that the trap so many of us fall into when reading this is trying to work out whether it is a literal account of creation, or just a story. Did God really create the world in 6 days? If so, does that mean that we can’t believe in evolution?

 My opinion, for what it’s worth, is that it really doesn’t matter. If you want to believe that God created the world in 6 days, that’s fine. And if you want to believe that it evolved over billions of years, then that’s fine too. Because the purpose of Genesis 1 and 2 is not to present a scientific account of creation: it was written with a different purpose in mind.

 Genesis 1 was probably written in the 6th-C BC, when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. And there was a Babylonian myth about how their gods had created the world that was in the form of a poem. And so Genesis 1 was written as a sort of ‘counter-claim’: you Babylonians think your gods created the world but actually, our God created the world. And Genesis 1 is written in the style of a poem that matches the claims of the Babylonian myth. So it’s a sort of ‘My God is better than your God’ poem. Now, that’s not to say that God didn’t create the world in 6 days: maybe he did. But the purpose of Genesis 1 is not actually to tell us scientific fact. Instead, it is a claim to the greatness of our God above all gods. So we don’t need to worry about whether or not this is a literal account.

 And likewise, with the creation of human beings: Genesis 1 and 2 isn’t concerned so much perhaps with a literal account of how it actually happened so much as trying to tell us theological truths about who we are. And if we want to discover the meaning of life, the purpose of our lives, then it is exactly this that we need to focus on. And as we turn to this passage to discover the meaning of life, there’s three things I want to say:

**1. We find meaning in life in relation to God**

You and I can only find true meaning in life if we know who we are in relation to God because that is the very foundation stone of our createdness. Verse 26: ‘Then God said: ‘Let us make humankind in our image…”’

 You and I have been created in the image of God and as each day passes and we grow deeper into a relationship with God, so the image of God within us becomes stronger and clearer. The more we rely on God in our lives, the more we allow him to direct our lives, so the greater is his image reflected in us through our love, our kindness, our compassion shown towards others.

 What journey are you on in life?

 Well, in one sense you might want to measure that in terms of your career, or getting better at a hobby, or earning more money or whatever. But the journey that you and I are really on, at its most profound and important level, is a journey into the image of God. And we only find our true meaning when we uncover how it was that we were destined to live.

 We need to continually seek to love others. We need to continually seek to forgive others. We need to continually seek to show compassion to others. And, in so doing, we are living out the image of God within us because that is exactly what God has done for you: he loves you, he has forgiven you, he shows compassion on you.

 And we want to mirror that in our own lives because that was the purpose for which we were created: “Let us make humankind in our own image”.

 What does that mean in a practical, everyday, sense? Well, I suppose it boils down to what motivates us, what drives us in life. The temptation for all of us is to seek our identity, our meaning, our purpose, in the things that will eventually pass away, the things that are only temporary: our jobs, our financial security, our relationships, our health. These things are important, of course, but they can never give us lasting peace because they are only temporary and they will end when we retire, or get unwell, or die. If we build our sense of self-identity on these things, we will be like the builder in Jesus’ parable who builds his house on the sand that gets blown away in the storm. Instead, we need to journey into a deeper awareness of where our identity is truly to be found, which is in our relationship with God and how that gets mirrored and worked out in how we treat others.

 That is the work of your life and mine: that journey is our purpose for living; to become the people we were destined to be.

 We find meaning in life in relation to God because it is only that relationship – you and God, me and God – that is eternal; it is only that relationship between us and God that provides lasting purpose and value in life.

 By all means, pursue a job, financial security, good health and the rest. But don’t fall into the trap of believing that these things can provide lasting happiness: they can’t. Only God can provide eternal happiness and a deep sense of fulfillment. So, as the song goes, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you”. Let’s make sure that we get our priorities right in how we live…

 So, first, we find meaning in life in relation to God.

**2. We find meaning in life in relation to the rest of creation**

God made us in his own image and then he immediately placed us into a relationship with the rest of the created order. Verse 26 again: “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

 Now, we can come at this verse from dozens of different angles and there is a whole lot of stuff that we can read into it. But I just want to make one, simple observation this morning, which is that we have to find our meaning in relation to the rest of the created order.

 I don’t want to get too sidetracked on this because we could spend the rest of our time thinking about our ecological responsibilities and the 5th Mark of Mission that we focus on. But let me come at it from another angle as to why it is important for us to find our meaning in life in relation to the created order, which is this:

 If I do not locate myself within the created order, I will only be able to live my life in reference to myself as if I truly am the centre of the Universe.

 If I don’t locate myself in relationship with everything else that is created, my ego will become inflated and I will think that every decision I make, every action I perform, should revolve around me. And furthermore, I will expect the people around me to treat me as if I am the centre of the Universe.

 But I am not the centre of the Universe: I am just one small part of an extraordinary network that incorporates galaxies near and far, billions of people, and the history of a cosmos that stretches back to the dawn of time.

 All the while I allow my ego to inflate my position in the created order, I cannot find true meaning in life because I will be living an egotistical lie.

 So each one of us, if we want to find meaning in life, if we want to discover our true purpose in life, must do so in relation to God first and in relation to the created order second. If we don’t do that, we will become egotistical and selfish. We will put ourselves at the centre of everything and become increasingly selfish whereas our true purpose in life means living a selfless life, not a selfish one. That’s why Jesus said, “The first shall be last and the last shall be first”. That’s why Jesus said, “If you want to live, you must die” - die to an inflated sense of self, die to ego.

 It really is not all about you. It really is not all about me.

 It really is all about God – and we need to find our true place in relation to God and his creation if we are to find true meaning and true purpose.

 And this then brings me to my third and final point:

**3. We find meaning in life through our worship**

We asked the question at the beginning, “Why were we created? What is our purpose?” The answer is remarkably simple: we were created in order to worship God.

 Full stop.

 What is the meaning of life? To worship God.

 What is your purpose in life? To worship God.

 Where will you find lasting fulfillment? In your worship of God.

 It’s a stark but brutal truth - that if worshipping God is not at the absolute centre of your life, then you will never find ultimate fulfillment. If the worship of God is not what gets you out of bed in the morning, if the worship of God is not what motivates you more than anything else, you will never find lasting peace and happiness. It may sound harsh, but it’s true – it’s what we were created for.

 And how do we know this?

 If you look through Genesis Chapter One, and what happens when God creates each day, look at how the day ends: verse 5: “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day”, verse 7: “And there was evening and there was morning, the second day”, verse 13: “And there was evening and there was morning, the third day” and so on: God completes each day and draws it to a close. And then on Day Six, he creates humanity, you and me, in readiness for Day Seven.

 But now go to verse 3 of Chapter 2, which says this: “So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.” God makes Day Seven, he makes it a holy day – but he doesn’t end it; there is no “And there was evening and there was morning, the seventh day”. And this means that the seventh day is still happening: the whole of the history of time, except for the first six days, is the seventh day. We are still living in the seventh day and will continue to do so until the end of time.

 Now why is that important?

 Because God created humanity – he created you and me on the sixth day specifically so that we could enjoy an eternal seventh day, which is us rested with God as God rests with us; just enjoying each other’s company and bathing in each others love. You are living in an eternal seventh day in which the whole purpose of you being in it is to adore God and enjoy being in his presence and enjoy the fact that God is loving you and resting with you.

 So what is the ultimate meaning of life? Well, it’s not 42! The ultimate meaning of life – your purpose in life, what you were created for is to enjoy an eternity at rest with God, worshipping him and adoring him. Yes, we find meaning in our jobs, our hobbies, our relationships with other people: but these are only temporary and will soon pass away. What lasts forever is the seventh day rest with God. What lasts forever is us worshipping and adoring God in his presence.

 The worship and adoration of God is the only place that you and I will find ultimate meaning and purpose to life because it was for that we were created.

 Now, realization of that truth must surely challenge how we live our lives. What is your work in life? It must be to worship God. What is your ultimate pleasure in life? It must be to worship God. Where will you find ultimate happiness? In your worship of God. Everything else we do in our daily lives must be worked around, fitted around, our worship of God, which is our true purpose. The problem is, we have an upside down view of things. We devote ourselves to the everyday things; work, chores, shopping, hobbies and so on - and if we get a few minutes spare, we might pray to God. To find true meaning in life, we need to turn that worldview on its head: worship God through prayer and praise, through loving others and serving others and then fit everything else around that.

 Is it a difficult thing to do? Of course it is! Because we have become so conditioned to see our lives in one way that we are being asked to learn a completely different way of living.

 Of course it’s tough! It’s as tough for me as it is for you, believe me! But if you and I are serious about finding happiness, if we are serious about finding purpose, if we are serious about finding out who we truly are, if we are serious about pursuing our destiny, and becoming fulfilled in life, then we absolutely must reorientate our lives so that the worship of God comes first and everything else follows on from that each and every day of the week - and also making coming to church each Sunday an absolute priority too. It’s the only foundation for true happiness – because it’s what you were made for…

 What that actually looks like for you on an everyday basis will look different for each one of us. If you want to meet up with me for a chat about what that might look like for you, then please drop me an email and we can get together to talk about it…

 But as we begin this new spiritual year together, as it were, after the Summer break, let’s be under no illusions: our ultimate purpose in life is the worship of God and everything else flows from that. And so we must recommit ourselves to making that our top priority.

 And just to finish…

 When I was writing this sermon, like all of us do, I was getting absorbed into the ‘work’ of the sermon and I nearly forgot to stop for 10 minutes to say my lunchtime prayers, which is part of my daily routine. Just like you, I too struggle to prioritise worship in the busyness of life! But I remembered and I stopped - and the opening prayer from the lunchtime liturgy was so pertinent for our theme that I am going to close now by saying this prayer. And if you feel challenged to reorientate your own life towards the worship of God, and want now to work out what that might look like in your own life, then please say this prayer along with me in your own heart. Let’s pray:

“Lord God, beautiful God…

I am giving you worship will all my life

I am giving you obedience with all my power

I am giving you praise with all my strength

I am giving you honour with all my speech.

I am giving you love with all my heart

I am giving you affection with all my sense

I am giving you my being with all my mind

I am giving you my soul, O most high and holy God.

Praise to the Father

Praise to the Son

Praise to the Spirit

The Three in One. Amen.