

# 40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

## DAY 20 – The Relationship between the Church and the World

*'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.'*

John 17:20-23

Why does the world even exist?

In his book, *Hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy*, Douglas Adams muses about a fictitious philosopher, Olan Colluphid who wrote the "trilogy of philosophical blockbusters" entitled "Where God Went Wrong", "Some More of God's Greatest Mistakes" and "Who is this God Person Anyway?". And the first mistake Olan Calluphid states is that "God created the universe". According to the book, most people in the universe believe this was indeed a bad move and that all of God's other mistakes proceeds from this fundament one.

But back to reality.

The truth of the world's existence IS the truth of God, the Father of Jesus Christ. We can only understand the world in which the church lives in view of who God is. We can only understand the world in which we live and how the church is placed in it because it is the world that is created and reconciled and is promised redemption in Jesus Christ. The world has no other purpose or meaning except the purpose and meaning that is given it by the fact that it is created and reconciled and is promised redemption in Jesus Christ.

So to understand the church and the world and how they are related to each other, we have to come to terms that there is not two different spheres, i.e. the church and the world as separate ways of understanding the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his essay, *Ethics (p62)*, soundly rejects the idea that there are two spheres. To do so would abandon reality as a whole, by placing one's self into one or the other of two spheres. i.e. The secular sphere or the religious sphere. "To do this is to seek Christ without the world or the world without Christ."

Reality, for Bonhoeffer, is that truth that is defined by God's action; truth that is defined by who God is. This action of God establishes the foundation of the relationship between God and the world which is prior to all human thinking, willing and believing. That is, the relationship between God and the world, the church and the world, is established by God. The Church does not establish its relationship to the world. According to Bonhoeffer, it is established by God's action which tells us what the church is and what the world is in relationship to the church.

This has real meaning when it comes to what we do as the church. To break bread and share communion in the midst of a community who, for all intents and purposes, have abandoned the church is more than just sharing a sacred moment amongst like-minded believers. For the action of God in communion is not just about who the church is, but who the church is in relation to the world. A God calling His people to commune with him is a calling of all creation to His table, by which we, who actually participate, do so on behalf of all creation. That's an awesome and yet humbling experience to understand, but it is the very nature of the relationship between the church and the world and how we all play a part in it.

### PRAYER

Gracious Father,  
May we never loose sight  
of the privilege to serve You  
To be countered as Yours.  
Forgive us when we think of the world and the church  
as two unrelated and separate things.  
For our church is not what we make it,  
But what You have willed it to be.  
May our prayers be always and ever for those  
who cannot or will not see the truth found in You. Amen