

WEEKLY SERMON

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You can't enjoy the apples while destroying the orchard!

Two weeks ago the scientist and author Richard Dawkins made headlines when he declared on LBC Radio that he considered himself to be a 'Cultural Christian'.

This is not the first time that Dawkins has made such a claim, but it was a very public forum and it caused quite a stir from both atheist and Christian perspectives.

There were some excellent responses by a range of commentators and I mention it because our New Testament passage this week, 1 John 3.16-24, gives a helpful clue as to why Dawkins' position is completely untenable.

Throughout the season of Easter, the lectionary has us reading the book of 1 John. One of the central themes of that letter is the idea that to be a Christian is to abide in God and as a result God's life abides in us and, as a result, we 'walk just as he walked'.

In our passage for this Sunday, John says: "All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them." (1 John 3: v24)

Our passage this week draws a picture of the sort of life that someone will lead if they abide in God: that person will lay down their life for other people (verse 16); they will not just give lip service to love but will demonstrate their love with action (verse 18); they will do all that Jesus has commanded them to do (verse 22).

Everything that is good about the Christian life: loving community; self-sacrificing love; a community ethos that prioritises the other; the weak and the powerless; even our churches with their beautiful architecture and the hospitals that Christians have built is generated by abiding in God.

There is no other way to live an Easter life than to abide in God. In short, the problem with Richard Dawkins desire to be a 'cultural Christian' is that he wants to have all that goes to make Christianity without abiding in God.

To put it another way: it is logically inconsistent to claim that you really enjoy the taste of delicious apples while simultaneously doing everything you can to destroy the orchard.

As you read this reflection – is there anything you need to do to more fully abide in God today?

Perhaps you need to take a moment to thank God for all the ways you have had the joy of enjoying the fruit of abiding in him.

During the season of Easter let us celebrate the fruit of resurrection. It is in the joy of the empty tomb from whence the good gifts of new life flow. As the collect for this week says:

*Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Rev Canon James Lawrence, Canon Missioner at Blackburn Cathedral

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