

Jigsaw puzzle or Satnav

Readings: Genesis chapter 45, verses 1-8; Ephesians chapter 1, verses 1-10

A horrible thing happened on the way to Mecca this week. Over 400 pilgrims were crushed during the annual pilgrimage with an appalling loss of life. And a Saudi Arabian Govt. Minister is reported to have said; "It was the Will of Allah". Which raises the question: Does God have a Plan and Purpose for our lives and can we do anything about it?

Three answers are possible.

- 1) Yes God does have a fixed Plan and Purpose and there is nothing we can do to alter it. All is predestined and predetermined.
- 2) Yes God does have a Plan and Purpose but it depends on our co-operation.
- 3) No, there is no Plan and Purpose and all happens by way of Accident or Chance.

I rule out the third option. To believe that life is a huge Accident waiting to happen requires more faith and incredulity than thinking there is some Plan and Purpose to it. Which leaves us with the first two options.

I like to think of it in terms of a Board Game which we have all played or a bit of technology we all use these days. **A Jigsaw Puzzle and a Satnav.**

Consider the Jigsaw Puzzle approach which illustrates Option 1. You start off with a thousand small pieces and the task is to fit them all together to make a complete picture. It takes time and immense patience. Each separate piece has its specific place in the whole picture. If you try and force it into the wrong space the picture won't work out. Of course it is possible to cheat a bit and have the full picture propped up in front of you but it still takes time and effort to fit the pieces into their predestined space.

The Old Testament writers worked with this approach. And the story of Joseph illustrates it perfectly. His jealous brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, thinking that would be the last they ever saw of him. Years later, when famine hit Palestine, they fled as economic migrants to Egypt and to their amazement and horror discovered that the Egyptian Minister of Agriculture was the brother they had sold into slavery. Our Old Testament reading told of their reunion. The brothers were petrified that Joseph would take the opportunity for revenge and to their utter amazement he didn't. Instead we have his incredible response; "Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves; it was not you who sent me here but God. God sent me before you to preserve life."

Nothing could be clearer than that. Everything had been predestined to happen in this way. Joseph and his brothers were simply pieces in a gigantic Jigsaw Puzzle and now the pieces had fitted together. Even the New Testament works with the same idea. St John's gospel says that Judas was predestined to betray Jesus and that the Cross of Christ was pre-ordained by God.

So many people think that whatever happens is predestined by God. That Saudi Arabian minister was simply voicing what thousands believe, including many Christians.

Which leaves us with Option 2. Yes God has a Plan and a Purpose but it is flexible and how it works out depends upon the responses we make. In other words the **Satnav** approach to life.

I well remember using a 'Satnav' when they first came out. I tried it out on a route that I knew well and hit the appropriate buttons. Trouble is that I knew a short-cut and when I turned off the Satnav route a blonde voice shouted at me "Turn back!" and the picture on the Satnav went ballistic. I ignored the Voice and then an amazing thing happened. The Satnav readjusted the route to

accommodate the short-cut. The blonde Voice called out another set of instructions and eventually I arrived at my destination safe and sound.

That's how God works. Yes, God does have a final Plan and Purpose but it is not fixed and static and predictable. God takes account of our responses and, to that extent, it is fluid and flexible.

God's Plan was described by Jesus as 'The Kingdom of God'. The Kingdom is a community characterised by love, joy, justice and peace. A community in which the Rule of God is operative at every level of life. That is God's Grand Design and, within it, we all have our part to play.

Often enough we foul it up. Our selfishness obstructs 'justice' and our 'will to power' obstructs peace. We limit our love to those whom we like and agree with. The result is that human relationships are disrupted and, worse still, hostility and violence break out. The result is that the world is in a right mess, so are personal relationships.

In response God uses the Satnav approach. He works with and within the responses we make to achieve His final purpose. Which is what Paul said in his Letter to Christians in Rome. "God works in ALL things for good with those who love Him and co-operate with Him."

That is both a comfort and a challenge. The comfort is that no situation is irredeemable and no person is beyond redemption. The challenge is to align ourselves with what we know to be God's Purpose so that in us, and through us, and by us, His Kingdom will come and His Will be done.