

Why do flowers grow?

This sounds like the question of a child seeking to understand the world.

Of course, there is more than one answer to the question.

- An artist might say a flower grows to bring color to the earth
- A philosopher might say to bring joy and delight to the spirit
- A botanist would say that flowers grow to produce seeds which fall to the earth and produce more flowers.
- A biologist might add that seeds and their pods or fruits grow as food for animals

The reason something exists may be seen from different perspectives,

but only one perspective can authentically stake the claim to truth – and that is the perspective of the thing's creator.

Just try telling the child her picture is a lovely giraffe when she meant it to be her mommy.

It is the Creator that gives true purpose to creation and each of its elements.

Over the next 4 weeks, God's Word leads us into the question of purpose.

What is Jesus' purpose?

What is our reason for being?

What is the aim and goal of our life?

How do we know we are fulfilling our true purpose?

When we look at Jesus,

we see someone begotten and sent by God

to break **barriers to life caused by sin.**

Let's think about barriers for a minute.

Barriers can be both good and bad.

- barrier reefs and islands protect the mainland from destruction;
- Vaseline creates a barrier on the skin to prevent destructive bacteria from entering the body.

Such barriers promote and preserve life in harmony, as God who created life intended.

Other barriers separate and divide what God means to unify, and prevent life from being abundant for all.

- The Berlin Wall, for example
- Hatred for groups of people because of who they are or what they look like
- Or the stigma attached to mental and emotional illness

Jesus' purpose is to break down the barriers to life caused by sin.

The first barrier we encounter in the Bible is the barrier of God's Command to Adam and Eve – do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for the consequences are death.

--God established this good barrier to preserve the goodness of creation and humanity's crowning role as stewards of all living things.

But in their willfulness, our human parents ignored God's good barrier and ate of the fruit of that tree.

The forces of death and destruction were unleashed and humanity could no longer live in the garden.

God placed a physical and spiritual barrier between humanity and God's eternal life

– two angels with crossed flaming swords guard the entrance to the garden and God's tree of Life.

The necessity of this barrier is sin.

And it is this barrier – fundamentally – that Jesus came to break down.

The purpose for Jesus is to undo the sin of Adam and Eve,

destroy death,

break down the barriers to Life,

and restore humanity to God's garden of abundant life for which we were created.

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Where I lived as a child was on a flight path for Phila. Airport as well as the naval air base at Willow Grove.

Every once in a while, we would hear a loud "boom" high in the sky, like an explosion.

I learned that it was a sonic boom, caused when a jet penetrated the sound barrier by moving faster than the speed of sound.

Let's make the sound of a BOOM!

One way to consider Jesus' purpose on earth is as a sonic boom – BOOM!

breaking the barriers that separate humanity from God and the eternal life for which we were created.

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In today's Gospel, Jesus meets a man not in his right mind, naked, and living in the tombs.

These are all images of barriers that keep this man from experiencing the life God created him for.

These are barriers of Satan that lead to death rather than life.

The Bible describes these forces as demonic – the power of sin and evil at work to kill and destroy.

Jesus has a purpose from God – to break down the barriers to God's life.

So he tells the demons to leave – and they refuse.

There is no question that Satan's power is strong.

You and I know that in our own lives.

- Whether we choose to interpret demon possession as a spiritual reality,
- or as mental illness,
- or as addiction or compulsion

- – it is still a force that we cannot overpower by our own strength.

Satan does not give up easily – we cannot rid ourselves of the impulses within us that lead us away from God.

Have you ever had the experience of discovering that the more you try to stay away from a bad habit, the stronger you feel the craving for it?

Satan argues to stay – it is hard to change – he knows we are weak.

But there is no arguing with Jesus.

Jesus purpose is to break the barriers to God's life.

Today in the tombs, Jesus means to restore the man to God's life – to God's created purpose for him.

And so, although it appears at first as though Jesus is being manipulated by the demons, the result is the same

– BOOM!

the demons are cast into the abyss and the man is freed to live as a human being.

Jesus broke the barrier – there was a sonic boom in the man's life, and in the life of that whole community.

Though here's an interesting thing -- most did not want it.

Instead of organizing a parade and victory speeches and celebrations at the man's restoration, the village people cowered.

They were terrified. What's with that?

Here is the sad truth.

It is easier to isolate ourselves behind our foibles and flaws than to have Jesus come and free us from them.

It is easier to have a crazy man locked up in the cemetery than to have Jesus come and turn my whole life upside down.

Our sinful natures prefer to live the self-made purpose for our lives than the purpose God created us for.

So the villagers begged Jesus to leave

– they didn't want their lives to change,

they didn't want their barriers to God's life removed; they just wanted to live and die as their ancestors had before them.

Only the man in the tombs got to share God's life that day.

The man who had been freed

– and cleansed and clothed and healed and restored
– knew Jesus to be the God who breaks the barriers of sin, death, and evil. BOOM!

His life had been transformed and he knew the difference between death and life, evil and good.

For him, there was no going back. Jesus had restored his humanity.

He wanted to follow Jesus – to go with him

– but Jesus clarified his God-given purpose in life – **to declare among his family and neighbors how much God had done for him.**

That was Adam and Eve's purpose in the Garden,

and it is the purpose to which Jesus restores us through his own breaking of the barrier of sin and death by his own death and resurrection.

BOOM!

Jesus comes into our lives to break down the barriers that keep us away from God

- barriers of our own sinful stubbornness,
- of Satan's hold on our habits,
- of the world's constant barrage of violence, hatred, and loathing.

Jesus comes with demon-releasing forgiveness and shackle-breaking communion. BOOM!

The question is, will we – like the man in the tombs

- let Jesus dwell in us,
- by his grace remove the barriers,
- and transform our lives as he did the demoniac?

Or do we love our lives so much that we are afraid of how Jesus will change us and tell him to go away?

This week, consider how you might live out the purpose God has given you to declare all the mighty things he has done for you.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Pentecost 5 C Pr.7

19 June 2016

St. Peter's

Isaiah 65:1-9; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

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