**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File Title: 'Guildford 15.10.75'. GLC speaking at a cathedral on the subject of Grace Recorded: 15/10/75

Duration: 00:42:09

Transcription Date: 04/04/2020

Archive Number: AV-S\_201

Start of Transcription

00:00:03 Leonard Cheshire: Well I would like to say how very privileged I feel to be standing here in this great cathedral this evening and to see so many of you who've come, I'm sure, from other occupations and many of you from far away. At the same time, I'm bound to say that I don't know how I'm going to talk as I would like to about the subject that Canon Telfer has given me. In fact, if I'd quite realised what it was he was asking me to talk about when I received his letter, I think really that I would've told him I couldn't come [audience laughter]. But I'm here and I will have to do my best and I thank you in advance for the good will that I know I have from you in my difficulty.

00:01:22 The subject that I've been given is grace, and I would like to try first to define what I believe grace to be, to say something about how, as we as Christians understand, it was bestowed upon the human race, upon us, and then to make one or two observations about it out of what I've seen in other people and in the various activities with which I've been involved. But I would like to try and do this, particularly, from the aspect of the destiny that God has decreed for us as human beings. The relationship between our destiny, what it is that we are meant to be struggling towards, and where grace helps us in that. Now by grace, we as Christians mean God living in us, the Holy Spirit living in us. St Peter talks of it in those beautiful words, 'By this we are made partakers of the nature of God.' And throughout Scripture and in the early writings of the Church – of the early Church – there are some beautiful references to this masterpiece of God's handiwork. In the Psalms, in the eighth Psalm – whoever the author of that Psalm might have been – we hear: 'I look up at the Heavens fashioned by your hands, at the moon and the stars that you've set in their place. Ah, what is man that you should spare a thought for him? The son of man that you should care for him? Yet you've made him little less than a god and crowned him with splendour and glory.' And although the psalmist can't have known exactly how true those words were, they do I think describe everything that I would like to try and talk about tonight.

00:04:32 In the early Church, we read such things as 'Just as the mother fashions and forms a child in her womb, so in the waters of baptism a new life is fashioned by God.' In other words, they talk about a new creation. And this, I believe, is what grace is. That we, by grace, are made sharers of God's life. We are brought into an intimate relationship with God, made His sons, His heirs. But of course, grace is a gift, as its name implies. It's a free, gratuitous gift. And it was given to man at a precise moment in history. Although we of course can't identify that precise moment, and I suppose never will be able to. And for a moment, in order to consider what our destiny is, I would like to pause and reflect upon God's creation.

00:06:13 We believe, as Christians, that God first created the angels, the world of the angels. Creatures of immense power and immense intellect, … each of which, in his different way, reflects one of God's infinite perfections, not subject to the frailty of men as we are, but pure spirits. And then, He created matter, the very opposite. One might say, the very contradiction of the spirit – of the world of the angels – inanimate matter. And out of matter, gradually, over eons of time, 5 000 000 000 years, the scientists tell us, gradually there evolved life, in its different forms. Steadily becoming more varied, more sophisticated and finally culminating in man. And in man, in all his human frailty, we see mingled every single aspect of God's creation. Man shares existence with matter, he shares life with the plants and the trees, he shares instinct and sense with the animals, and intellect and will with the angels. We might say that in man is brought together - is bridged perhaps - the whole of God's creation, that the world of the angels is bridged to the world of inanimate matter. And in this frail being that is man, God intends to unify and bring into a harmony that is beyond our power to conceive of, the whole of His creation. Not only that, the Son of God became man himself, in order that man – and with him the entire physical creation – could be brought into the glory in which God himself lives. We are to be united with God in Heaven, that is our destiny, the destiny that God has decreed for us.

00:09:39 But after he created man, at some time, he bestowed upon him this priceless gift of grace. But it was a conditional gift. Man had to fulfil a condition. The condition was that he would remain subject to God. In other words, he had to show that he meant to keep this gift, that he wanted it. Because God does not force even his greatest gifts upon a man who doesn't want to receive it. And as we know, man did not keep that condition. Whatever it was that the precise condition may have been, we don't know. But we presume that man's fault was in wanting to set himself up as master of his own life, and not be subject to God. And so, the precarious hold that man had on this priceless gift was lost, and man fell – he fell from grace. And so now, God set upon the work of restoring that gift, of giving it back, of creating the conditions in which it could be given back. Of course, with man's fall, there'd entered into the world something new, and that something new was Evil, or more precisely, it was Satan – a personal, very real Devil. And perhaps one of our shortcomings today is that we've ceased really to believe in a personal Devil, somebody who is determined to prevent us receiving grace, and if we receive it, of keeping it. He's in total opposition to the life of grace that we need within us. And so finally when God's plan was complete, the Son of God became man in order to restore what we had lost, and in order to do this, he had to destroy the consequences of sin, that is to say death.

00:12:42 Now, tonight from a personal point of view, I would like to talk as best I can in the context of those who suffer, because suffering, as well as death, is the consequence of man's fall. And I would like to go back a long time, to the end of the war, because for me this is where the story began. I belong to a generation that was thrown into a World War. A generation that wanted war no more than any other generation wants war, but, in our circumstances, there was no option but to accept that dreadful challenge and go to war. We thought that at the end of it, when the threat that faced us was destroyed, there would be the basis upon which a new world order of peace and freedom and justice could be built. And I think it was probably that hope that sustained people through the difficulties that inevitably a war of that nature brings. But at the end of it, we found that this hadn't been achieved, that man was still capable of fighting his fellow man, that violence still stalked the Earth. If one comes to think of it, peace is not something that we can have as of right, although we'd like to think that we can. If we want peace, we have to make some sacrifice for it, we have to be willing to give in to somebody else on occasions, whether it's in our own family, our own community, our nation or in the whole world. Peace will never come to us unless we ourselves do something towards it. But one asked oneself – 'What? What can I, as an individual, do in a constructive, realistic way, towards the cause of world peace? Such a faraway, distant cause?' And at the end of the war, this was the question that like so many others, I asked myself. And I couldn't answer it. I was bewildered and lost. I thought – dimly – that the only constructive thing you could do was to find some great crusade or cause that measured up to the goal of world peace, but of course I couldn't find it. And then, a little later, I came face to face with an old man, dying of cancer. In the neighbouring county of Hampshire, in a smallish cottage hospital. And the matron said – 'There's nothing more that we can do for him, we can't afford to keep his bed – to block his bed – because there are others waiting for treatment whom we can cure and send home.' So she wanted somewhere else for him to go. One could see her point of view. It was 1948, the National Health Service had come into being, the old man, Arthur Dykes, was an ex-serviceman, and a great deal was done in those days for ex-servicemen, so one presumed that it would not be difficult to find somewhere else for him. But I couldn’t find anywhere, even with all the contacts and strings and so on that I could make use of. And so, for want of anything better, I took him into a house that I owned, and with what help I could find, looked after him. For me it was just an interlude, I didn't feel that having met him, and seen him, and known him as an individual, I could turn my back and walk away. But I knew that this was not my life, my work. However, it so happened that I was wrong, and that he opened the door for me onto a world that I never knew until that moment existed: the world of the disabled.

00:18:13 In those days, the late 1940s, I think it's fair to say that there was very little provision, especially for the young adult disabled. If anywhere, they would be in chronic wards, which is to say a geriatric ward – an old persons' ward – or, unless they were very fortunate, they would be living somewhere at home, with little opportunity for much of a life, lying in bed, being looked after as best as the family could manage. And so gradually I came to know a little about this world. I learned what I hadn't known at that time – that a person who becomes disabled through whatever cause – anyway more disabled than makes it possible for them to manage on their own – wants everything for his life that we, who are not disabled, want for ours. They do not want to be put down in a bed, or in a room somewhere and have everything done for them. I had thought then that, with Arthur and the others, that they should be put into a room, made as comfortable as possible and give them what they wanted. I learned that what they want, first and foremost, is independence, the opportunity to live a full life, a creative life, to be themselves, to be wanted, and most of all, to feel needed, to feel that there is somewhere in the world where they can make their contribution to society, not to be looked upon as a passenger.

00:20:32 In the 27 years since that day, the world of course has become much more aware of the hopes and aspirations of the disabled. But not sufficiently aware. Today, with the technological advances that we've made, with improved welfare services and so on, I think one can say that there is no disabled person who can't be given the opportunity of a constructive, positive life. To take one example – an extreme example, but nevertheless one that does illustrate what can be done: a girl who sadly died about three months ago, called Hilary Pearl. When she was young, she was very active, she was athletic, she was full of life and vigour. And then she fell to a disease which gradually made her paralysed – or very quickly made her paralysed – to the point where the only part of her body that she could move was her big toe. She couldn't breathe, she had to be kept alive by a breathing machine, she couldn't eat, she had to be artificially fed, she couldn't see, because her eyelids were down, she couldn't talk, but she could hear. And attached to her big toe was a little microswitch, which she could operate by pressing. And this microswitch, through the medium of an electronic box well-known to many of you called a possum, could do a number of things. It could turn on her radio, select her channel and adjust her volume. She could turn on her hi-fi because she was musical and liked music and play what she wanted at the volume she wanted. What is more, she could type. And if you went to see Hilary you could talk to her, she'd listen to what you had to say and she would type you an answer – sometimes quite a sharp answer, 'cause she was very quick at summing people up. You could have a meaningful conversation with her. She composed poetry. She organised all sorts of schemes and other projects to help other people. In other words, she really and truly turned her life to good account. I know that some people, seeing Hilary at her lowest, would have said – and I respect their sincerity – would have said 'better to let her just slip away', but Hilary was determined to live. She wanted to live and she wanted to turn her life into something constructive, and she did. And to me she stands as a symbol of the desire that burns in the hearts of all the disabled – not only the disabled, but the poor, the hungry, those who have no opportunities in life because of their physical circumstances or their deprivation – the desire that burns in all their hearts to be useful, needed members of society. And of course we know from our faith that in fact everybody has a part to play, there is nothing so small that it can't be turned to good account. But it's easy to know that and to profess it, it's another thing to believe it, particularly if one is oneself the person under those circumstances.

00:25:24 Hilary Pearl could never have achieved what she did achieve but for the skill of the doctors, the care of the nurses, the affection and love of her family and friends, and also the contribution of the scientists and the technicians. In other words, if those who are deprived of their normal faculties, or deprived of opportunities of doing what they would like to do in their lives, are to have those opportunities restored to them, we must help. I think that whoever went through a World War learned two things in particular. First, that there isn't really such a thing as individual achievement. An individual may come up and appear to shine out, but in fact, whatever he may have achieved is due to a whole number of others, that it's a team achievement. And often people who are totally unknown, in the cookhouse or somewhere in the background, have in fact contributed essentially to what has been achieved. That we are truly dependent one upon another, that we are involved one with another, that we cannot isolate one section of the community, let alone one of ourselves. We only flourish and succeed when we are together. And also, I think, the war teaches us what can be achieved when there is unity of purpose, when we know what we are about.

00:27:29 The sad thing, perhaps, is that war, which is so dreadful in itself, has at least the merit of enabling us to see what our common objective is. We know – it's obvious – we know that if we don't win, we will sink, and therefore everything has to be subordinated towards the attainment of our goal. But in peacetime, which itself is essentially good, we don't always see our common goal. It is difficult to bring to peacetime the same urgency that we bring to war. And yet, the issue is the same. The struggle of today's generation to achieve unity and peace is just as urgent, just as real, as the struggle of yesterday's generation to ward off the threat that was coming towards us from the other side of the Channel. But it's difficult to see.

00:28:53 I think that … what is important is that we should recognise what are some of the routes of future war. And one of the routes, at least, is injustice. Particularly the difference between the poor of the world and the rich. Today, the world knows what is happening on the other side of the human race. The poor know there are others who live under totally different circumstances from themselves, and if we don't go out to do something, to put right this imbalance, then we are storing up for the future the seeds of possible confrontation. It cannot be right that in the one human family of which we are all members, all destined for the same eternal goal, that we remain content to leave others in such hardship.

00:30:24 But we ask ourselves 'What can we do?' And the answer to that question, 'What can we do?' is not, as I had once thought, looking for the great cause, it's doing what lies within our reach, doing the small things that come our way, but doing them in a great way, doing them in the knowledge that everything has a meaning in God’s plan, believing firmly in our hearts that every single one of us has a unique place, an essential place in God' plan for the final, ultimate destiny of the human race. Our role in it may be very small, may seem useless, and if that is the case, then our task is the more difficult, because it’s simple when we are doing something that everybody can see is important and good – it is relatively simple to keep doing it. People congratulate you. People say 'That's very good'. And so, you have an incentive to go on, and clearly if that is your role you must go on. But if you are somewhere where you are doing nothing at all spectacular, something that may seem quite stupid to somebody else, it is not so simple.

00:32:11 And when we talk about grace, we mean that the Holy Spirit is living in us and, if everything is well, is ruling us. But we, like all human beings, don't really like to be ruled by somebody else, even if it is the Holy Spirit. Particularly when we find that we are being pushed into doing things that we don't quite understand. And even in the case of our Lord, I think we can detect moments when He himself wondered. Most notably, at the end of his life, when he was on the cross, and he said 'Why, why has thou desertest me? – deserted me?' I know that that has been explained away by some of the commentators on Scripture in the sense that it was only said for us, that He knew that His Father had not deserted Him. But that is not the literal, ordinary sense of what He said. And I think we are justified in believing that He meant it – that He felt it – that He felt deserted at that particular moment, for indeed at that moment He'd taken upon himself, for our sakes, all our sins, and therefore it is understandable that He should feel unwanted by God.

00:34:10 And all of us, I think, in our lives have been through moments when we wonder why on Earth this particular happening or this particular course has come our way. We see no sense in it. We are afraid of moving onto strange, unknown territory. But God's ways are so different from ours, that we may be quite sure that if he is ruling our life, then we will be pushed into ... areas that we don't understand, we don't see the sense of. Throughout history we see it in others. When He chose Abraham to set him apart and to be the father of the Jews out of whom our Lord was to come, He made him leave his country, move off. He made promises to him that looked as though they could never be fulfilled. And Abraham had to believe, he had to have faith. And for the most part, though not always, he did. And he was rewarded for his faith.

00:35:39 The grace that is in us, we may be quite sure, will give us strength for whatever trial comes our way. We receive grace for the particular moment. We sometimes look forward at something that we know is going to happen and are afraid. But we shouldn't really look forward to that moment with fear. In preparation, yes, but not in fear, because we may be sure that God will give us the grace that we need, and I think that if we look back into our lives we know that. We know that when it comes to the point, it often isn't as bad as we had feared. We must believe that if God set something before us, He will give us the strength to see it through. And we must believe that even if we can't see the sense of it and never will, and may perhaps end up as a failure, that ultimately there is a real reason. So that in giving us this priceless gift of grace, which is a sharing in the life of God Himself, God is going to ask us to play our part. I think there are three particular ways in which we need to respond.

00:37:22 Firstly, that we should fulfil ourselves, that as best we can, we should develop ourselves inwardly, intellectually, culturally, artistically – every way that we can, we should develop our interior selves. But secondly, we should do so unselfishly, we should do so in love – not a love that wants to possess, but a love that wants to give, for we may be sure that we don't really develop except in communion with others. And thirdly, we should be willing to transfer the main interest of our lives into the good of the world as a whole – the good of the world in which we live. We should set out to contribute something to the world, because the world in which we live and out of which we come – for after all we were fashioned out of the slime of the earth, and yet were made in the image and likeness of God – that entire world is gradually evolving, developing, ever upwards, ever closer together, towards a deeper knowledge and understanding of a personal God. It is developing towards the ultimate destiny that God has decreed for it, and we are essential members, each one of us, in bringing that about. And if we think to ourselves that this goal is too great, that we can't understand it – which of course we can't – we should be content with doing the little things that come our way. Everything that I've seen these 27 years has convinced me that it is in the circumstances of our own lives that we find fulfilment. And that if we are prepared to make the utmost of every opportunity we have, then we are doing what God wants of us. And that the true test is not the achievement itself but the effort, the sacrifice and the motives that have gone into whatever we have done. I don't think that any of us would dare to say that no ... matter what our position in life ... that our greatest achievement, if we have one, can be any greater than that of somebody like Hilary Pearl, who succeeded in the face of such difficulty in leading a happy, uncomplaining and constructive life. And I think, too, that the great role and vocation of those who suffer is first – to set us an example of how we should lead our own lives, and secondly – that by the acceptance of their sufferings, by leading happy lives in the midst of it, they bring down onto our world or unto us, who seem to have so much material prosperity and opportunity relative to them, so many blessings and so much grace from Heaven. And again, I thank you for having invited me tonight and for your kindness in having come and listened so patiently, to me. Thank you.

00:42:06: *Speech ends*

00:42:09: *End of recording*

End of Transcription