

All That Matters

There are moments in life when we are made to ask the question, what matters most? - or moments that we reflect on life and say all that matters to me is this or that?

Tell me all that matters to you?

If I were to give you paper and a pen right now, and ask you to write a list of five things that are of paramount importance in your life right now, what would they be?

Take a moment now and think of the five most important things that matter most to you! I'll give you a couple of minutes and write them on your mind. I'll help you.

No 1 – what matters most to me and then to No 5.

Do you know, it would be interesting comparing our lists; I wouldn't be surprised if we all shared common threads.

This is the final Sunday of the year, and its a good Sunday to reflect about our lives. I learned in my previous charge from one of my elders whose job was to train managers at Rolls Royce – to get them to the highest standards, and he used two questions which were simply designed to get them to reflect on their practice or on the conclusion of a job that they had just finished.

They were invited to think about what went well.

And what could make it even better?

Great questions to ask ourselves at the end of a year?

What has gone well for us in 2024 and what could have been better?

I think in creating a list of five things that matter the most to us, we will discover that they are all that really matters.

Sir Chris Hoy has guided my thoughts, his book is simply called, “Sir Chris Hoy, All That Matters”. He writes it after reflecting on his illustrious career of being a top Olympian cyclist and everything going well and suddenly his world falls apart – cancer invades his body and so invades his family and heartbreak follows.

Sir Chris has been forced to ask the question, what matters most? - and he discovers all that matters to him.

So back to my list of five things that matter most to me, and I use this as a guide because I think the things in my list may well connect with your list.

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| 1. Faith | Spiritual wellbeing |
| 2. Family | Emotional wellbeing |
| 3. Food | Physical wellbeing |
| 4. Friends | Relational wellbeing |
| 5. Football | Social wellbeing |

Within these five markers there lies a breadth of development.

Faith represents, who I am and what I stand for.

Faith gives us a unique identity. You see faith shines a light into who we are and why we are here. It asks ultimate questions. It gives purpose to life. It provides clues to our existence. Faith asks the question, who are you and do you matter? That's why it heads up my list.

The particular faith that I have inherited, or signed up to, is the faith that comes from Jesus Christ, My faith is grounded on his life, his faith, his journey, his hope, his death and resurrection, and so a starting point for me, when asked that question, what matters most, I would respond, what matters most is faith.

When I put that first then in the words of Jesus, everything else will fall into place, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all will be given". If you like, faith is like the hub at the middle of a circle and the circle is made up of the other aspects, family, friends, food, football.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard asked the existential questions, about our being and our living on Planet Earth, and for him it begins here with the question why. Kierkegaard turned his gaze inward, asking not what the world is made of, but how one ought to live in it. He speaks of taking a leap of faith into the arms of the divine. This is about jumping from the uncertainty of life into a personal and direct relationship with the divine.

Turn to Psalm 139 and you discover the psalmist challenged by these same issues, life and existence, birth and death, and it is the most wonderful poem ever composed, it speaks into the depths of our existence. It gives us a reason for living, we have been created for a purpose, we are answerable to a higher force, we are surrounded by his presence, and even when we die, we will be with him forever. Ultimate thoughts and ultimate reasons for living and dying.

So faith, for me, is of ultimate importance and it was faith that made Hannah bring her son to the Temple and she left Samuel in the capable hands of Eli the priest. It was faith that made Mary take her baby boy to be circumcised after 8 days, and then brought him to the temple to be dedicated to God after 40 days. You see faith is all that mattered to these women, it changes our lives in the present and gives us hope for the future and a reason for the past.

It was faith that made the Apostle Paul reach out to churches in Asia Minor, and write to them to correct their thinking and their teaching, while he was imprisoned for his own faith. Paul had faith that Christ was building his kingdom on Earth, and that Paul was to point Christ church in the right direction as he encourages them to clothe themselves in Christ.

The second word on my list of what matters most is Family.

Now, I would be surprised if that wasn't on your list. Chris Hoy has family high on his list. He speaks of the strength that he receives from his wife and he says "She means everything to me and continues to mean everything to me. She knows every part of me, the sad me, the heartbroken me, the happy me, the determined me, and she's been at my side throughout it all, my one constant."

When disaster strikes, be that illness, bereavement, where do we turn to but family, where do we draw strength from but family. In our readings today we see family in action, Hannah's family is now complete in the arrival of her baby boy Samuel – her heartbreak of being childless is over and she feels complete and when she presents him to the Temple, Eli the priest blesses her and prays that she may know family blessings.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus arrive as a family unit to the temple; they have withstood the storm of the first Christmas night; the uncertainty around the birth, where to stay, who would give them welcome and shelter, who would protect them, they have found a path through the accusing fingers pointing in their direction because of the nature of the birth, and now their sea is calm for the moment, and they come together as a little family, to give thanks to God for their son and in doing so they are entering into the family of God's people with godly men and women like Simeon and Anna ready to bless them – let us never forget the importance of the church family to bless us and strengthen us on our journeys.

20 years since the tsunami wreaked havoc in the Indian Ocean and stories have come out of the sheer scale of loss and devastation, but in the midst of all this there are stories of courage and rebuilding of lives through the love of families.

Families are our human support in times of trouble and in the words of Simon and Garfunkel, they are like a “bridge over troubled waters”. So what matters most, and I would be surprised if we are not all in agreement that family is high on the list.

I've put food down there as number three, food represents survival, if we have no food, we have no chance to go on and live fruitful lives. Food and shelter are essential basic components of life. Mary and Joseph, poor as they were struggled to survive and food and shelter were high on their priorities that first Christmas Night. Now if we have a roof over our heads and food on our tables then we are blessed people. So, what matters most, is that our family and friends can survive and thrive because we are blessed with the basic essentials of life.

Next on my list, I have put friends, because we can't survive without human company and contact. If we were castaway on a desert island, without human contact and friendship, we would have a lonely and painful existence. We all need friends, allies, people we can depend on, and who give us support and comfort, who make us laugh and help us to get perspective to life.

God did not leave Mary and Joseph to struggle through the birth of Jesus alone, he sent shepherd to visit them, they entered the maternity unit of Bethlehem stable to bring comfort and encouragement to Mary and Joseph, as well as worshipping the child, and a year later the wise men turned up and brought gifts to the holy couple, that would give them hope and support on their journey.

Finally I put football, or I could have put sport or hobbies or other interests because life is there to be explored and enjoyed and discovered and so whatever that avenue of interest is for you, then pursue it.

I once had a very wise member of a former congregation and he would say take a good book with you on holiday John, something different, something that is away from your normal theological reading, and he was right, it's good to explore other interests, and to develop our understanding of this wonderful world.

Chris Hoy wrote this for his two young children, "Live life with a smile on your face, and joy in any situation, and follow your passions, The world is a big place, go out there, find out what you enjoy and give it everything!"

So, I come back to where I started on this last Sunday of the year and I ask you, what matters most and you will find that when you make your list, it is all that matters.

I encourage you over the next few days, just to make some time to consider that question, what matters most, maybe you want to get a notebook and write it down or send away for one of those books, "from you to me" journey of a life time, and write down those things which matter most because one day someone will read it and they will discover all that matters to you.

I'm sure our thoughts and prayers are with Sir Chris Hoy and his family at this time but as he says, "I also want people reading this who have just had their own damning diagnosis – be that cancer, another illness or something else all together – and their friends and families – to know that you can find a way through."

He finishes his book with a poem by Jim Boswell which was said at his son Callum's blessing when he was a baby.

'Follow Your Dreams'

When others say "It's hopeless and it really can't be done."

When they tell you "It's all over. It's a race that can't be won."

And they promise "You could spend your life just lying in the sun."

Follow your dreams boy. Follow your dreams!

When the people you admire, but who wouldn't understand,

Tell you "Other roads are safer. Your dreams are much too grand."

Or the doubters and the tempters try to take you by the hand.

Follow your dreams boy. Follow your dreams!

*You should listen to the counsel of the people that you trust.
But don't be turned aside just because they might get fussed
You live the life that in your heart you know you really must.
Follow your dreams boy. Follow your dreams!*

*There is nothing you can't conquer if you believe you can.
No mountains you can't straddle, no oceans you can't span.
Just conjure up a vision and set yourself a plan.
Follow your dreams boy. Follow your dreams!*

Amen