


## A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR



Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

Human beings are apparently the only creatures on this planet who care deeply about origins and destinations. Questions of meaning seem nearly universal for humans, at least, after our most basic needs are attended to.

There are a lot of theories which hold religion arises to give answers to those questions. Religions exist to tell us where we came from and where we're going. There's almost a one-for-one question-to-answer ratio in some of those theories.

But I think maybe we create stories not so much to directly answer questions but to satisfy longing. The longing isn't for information, but for context in which to exist. Fundamentalisms are born when answers matter more than questions, more than stories, more than Jacob wrestling God.

In Macbeth, the protagonist, plans spinning out of control, delivers the lines above, a beautiful and tragic expression of nihilism, the realization that life is meaningless, and every step is a step toward the grave.

Of course, if Macbeth had been a nihilist at the beginning of the play, he wouldn't have tried to make himself king of Scotland or worried about the sons of other men ascending the throne after him, and the story might have been much shorter. There is a lot of murder in Macbeth, and it's all because Macbeth is wants something that seems permanent. Had he been a nihilist from the start, he probably wouldn't have killed a king, as well as dozens of others. If he had accepted his brief candle and hour on the stage, the idiot's tale would have been much different. But his insight—or his despair— comes late in the story, and the damage is done.

There is some speculation that Shakespeare wrote Macbeth while he was mourning the death of his son. If that's the case, Macbeth's words take on even more gravity. Shakespeare's lament over life's brief candle isn't only universal. He isn't simply grieving the brevity of all human life, but one small life in particular. There is tragedy in specificity.

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Shakespeare interpreted across five centuries, but art, like human life, isn't accountable to direct inquiry. Art is as much a walking shadow as any human life. But his idiot tales have staying power, probably because they don't provide simple solutions.

In an interesting post on the blog *The Gleaming (S)word*, this line jumped out at me: "Shakespeare raises questions, but only toys with answers." I've often thought—likely because I've often heard—that good questions are better than good answers. To be honest, that feels like a sidestep. We need good answers. We need to know what's over the horizon, what killed the dinosaurs, how viruses evolve.

Those are questions of how, not why. Creatures who are as self-aware also want to know why.

The problem with answers to why, though, is that they ultimately don't satisfy the way questions do.

Questions, turning inside you over a lifetime, create sharp little jolts of intense inexpressible insight, brilliances which shift the very course of your brief hour upon the stage. You might not remember the insight; it probably won't even be a thought. Those are the moments where the stage is lit, where the sound and fury signify something, even if what is signified is beyond mere words.

Holy Week and Easter are close. Christian history is replete with answers about meaning and purpose. Sermons this time of year hold up the resurrection as an answer—the answer—to questions of meaning or purpose.

How can we also think about the crucifixion and resurrection as a question? I don't mean questions about the event but allowing the event to ask us something. I don't know how to pose such a question—it's probably beyond words itself. But it's the kind of question that occasionally, unexpectedly, electrifies you with apprehension beyond syllables.