

Sermon
Easter 6-C
St. Andrew's, Methuen
May 22, 2022
William Bradbury

Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

John 14:23-29

As I often say, growing up in the South I was surrounded by folks who bought into the notion that if they just followed the Bible closely enough, they could get back to true Christianity as Jesus taught it and Peter and Paul lived it.

"Gimme that old time religion", they'd sing.

One major problem is that modern Western human beings are different from the ancient near eastern women and men who populate the pages of the New Testament.

For example, in our readings today two people describe a mystical experience—a vision—that makes a radical difference in their lives.

Paul has a night vision of a man of Macedonia pleading with him to come over and help us.

So Paul tells his buddies about the vision and they immediately set out for Macedonia, convinced that God spoke to them directly.

John exiled on the Island of Patmos describes his vision of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven—and he passes on this vision to us because he believes they will change our lives.

For ancient peoples this is ordinary stuff. People listen to their dreams and visions because in these communications **they learn how to live in harmony with Life.**

Not for the first time I ask you: have you ever had a vision? Did you act on it?

I know some of you have, but you may be afraid to talk about it for fear someone will lock you up.

Mostly we have taught ourselves to disregard these messages that bubble up from within, because we depend completely on our thinking mind to control our world.

Primitive peoples, however, understand themselves to be part of nature, and expect Nature's God to speak to them.

Modern people imagine themselves to be separate from nature and think of nature as a dumb thing, as an object to be manipulated, pushed and pulled to give us what we think we need. So, we dam rivers, dig mines, build temperature-controlled buildings but never expect to hear God speak to us.

We also until recently took native children from their parents and put them in schools to root out this ability to listen to visions.

Native peoples listened to their dreams to learn when the buffalo were coming. We check our smartphone to find the grocery store hours.

This way of being in the world has produced wealth, but at a high price, because we **have lost touch with the other half of our souls.**

On a trip to the United States in 1935 Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung interviewed the chief of the Pueblo Indians in Taos, New Mexico. His name, Ochwiay Biano, means "Mountain Lake".

Biano said to the famous psychiatrist: "See how cruel [your type of people] look. Their lips are thin, their noses sharp, their faces furrowed and distorted by folds. Their eyes have a staring expression; they are always seeking something. What are they seeking? **[They] always want something; they are always uneasy and restless.** We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think they are mad."

"Jung asked him why he thought all [modern people] were mad.'

The chief replied, "**They say that they think with their heads**".

"Why of course. What do you think with?" Jung asked him in surprise.

"We think here' he said, indicating his heart." Memories, Dreams,

Reflections 247-8

Early in my ministry I hoped God would give me a vision—because that would be more interesting to talk about than what I was preaching at the time. I outgrew this desire for visions, however, because visions can destabilize your life. And who wants that—after all, aren't we religious in order to stabilize our lives?

When I joined Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) my first year at the University of Georgia it was because I was looking for help. I was lonely, confused, and a bit sad and CCC offered me friendship, happiness, and transcendent peace.

In their famous tract, "The Four Spiritual Laws", it says when you don't have Christ seated on the throne of your heart, your life is filled with discord

and frustration, but when Christ is on the throne life moves toward order and harmony around Christ.

The four Spiritual Laws are simplistic and idealistic, but they provide a place to start as they move us from narcissism toward discipleship; from fragmentation toward wholeness.

Although I had been an active churchgoer, I remember sitting on the bed in my dorm room at Georgia and asking Christ to live in my heart. That's always a prayer Christ answers, though the struggles of life don't disappear.

In one sense we don't ever outgrow this move—**every morning we must remake the commitment to open our heart to Christ.**

In the reading from Acts Luke says, "A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us" and "**The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.**"

Back in 2020 you'll remember I preached about the three locations God inhabits in our lives: God outside us, God with us, and God inside us. I used hand gestures from Paul R. Smith's excellent book, "Is Your God Big Enough? Close Enough? You Enough?: Jesus and the Three Faces of God"

God outside us—hands lifted

God with us—hands folded in prayer

God inside us—hands crossed on our chest.

Most Christians resonate with **God outside us**: God high and lifted up, like the window above our altar, showing Christ the King on his throne in heaven, surrounded by angels swinging pots of incense.

Many can also relate to **God with us**: O Come, O come, Emmanuel—which means God with us.

But **God inside us**? Our difficulty taking seriously "God inside us" comes from at least four places:

+one, we have not been taught that God is in our hearts, minds, souls, consciousness—So we look to Google to feed ourselves more information, as if that could save us.

+two, we certainly don't feel worthy of such a thing;

+three, we think that if the God who created the universe and appeared in Jesus were in there, we would have noticed!

+four, if true, it would mean we have to let go and let God live through us and therefore, we might lose control like a Pentecostal who raises her hands in worship and falls on the floor during prayer.

Or get dunked in the river and then offer hospitality to Paul and his companions after God opened Lydia's heart.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus says: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and **we will come to them and make our home with them.**"

When we wake up each day to the reality that we are not alone inside our hurting hearts, we can renew our trust in the promise Jesus makes to us: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Then, with each breath we can breathe in gratitude...and breathe out compassion—just like Jesus.