

SUNDAY SERMON – MAY 25, 2008

KNOWING GOD AMONG US

Ephesians 1:15-23 pt. 2

1:15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

In looking at Ephesians 1:15-23 we saw that Paul seems to connect our ability to know God to our relationship with the community of faith. He says that it is “among the saints” that we will know “the riches of the glorious inheritance” that is ours in Christ. Paul makes this connection between the church and our ability to experience God, because of his exalted vision of the church.

For Paul, the church is the body of Christ. The church is that container, or vehicle that makes present the reality of Christ in the world today. Paul says the church is “the fullness of God who fills all in all.” It is in relationship to the saints, that is in the church, Paul says that we will come to know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power.” And this power that we experience in the church is the same power of God that was at work in “Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.” (1:20,21)

The problem of course for most of us is that the church does not look or feel much like what we think of when we think of “the fullness of God.” The church as most of us know it does not seem to embody “the immeasurable greatness of God’s power.” The church doesn’t seem to demonstrate that power of God that “raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand.”

Perhaps the church was very different in Paul's day from what we experience today. But the evidence of Paul's own letters suggests that in Paul's day the church was just as divided, conflicted, and compromised as the church is today. Perhaps Paul is just a starry-eyed idealist unwilling or unable to see the realities of church as it really was in his day. But, again, Paul's letters are filled with the most clear, forthright, blunt descriptions of the problems in the church of his day. Paul was a clear-eyed realist when it came to assessing the church of his day. He was not refusing to face the reality of problems in the community simply so he could convince himself that God really was present in the church.

So, what are we to make of the disparity between Paul's exalted vision of the church and our own perceptions of the church as we experience it?

The problem is not with Paul's understanding of the church, or with his unwillingness to see the struggles of the church. The problem is with our ability to perceive the reality towards which Paul is pointing. Paul identifies our problem in verse 18 when he prays that the Ephesians may have the "eyes of their heart enlightened." When the "eyes of your heart are enlightened," Paul says, you will "know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints." (1:18)

Our problem is not that the power of God is missing from the church. Our problem is that we do not know what the power of God looks like, or how to see it. The power of God that Paul says is present in and through the church looks different from the way we normally think of power. And, if we are going to perceive the presence of God's power in the church, we must be willing to look at the church in a way that is different than we normally look at life. If we are going to look different we must have the "eyes of our heart enlightened."

So, we need to think about this expression that is translated in the NRSV as having "the eyes of your heart enlightened."

The fundamental problem with the spiritual life is that the things we are talking about are not comprehensible by the normal senses. We cannot apprehend spirit using those senses that we are normally accustomed to using in our attempts to process reality. You cannot see with your physical eyes the dimension of the spiritual realm. You cannot touch God with your hands, or hear God's voice with your physical ears. The spiritual realities towards which faith points us cannot be tasted or smelled. If we are going to perceive the reality of the spiritual dimension of life, we must develop a further sense, a sixth sense beyond those physical senses that we are accustomed to using to navigate the world around us. Paul calls this sixth sense, the "*ophthalmos su dianoia*."

The word "*ophthalmos*" is simply eye. It refers most commonly to the physical eye. But here it is being used metaphorically to communicate the idea that we are able to "see" or to perceive something beyond the physical realm. Paul is talking here about a subtle perceptivity that is part of the human condition. He is suggesting that we humans have an organ that goes beyond the abilities of our physical eyes, ears, taste buds and normal

physical senses. Paul is talking about an eye that sees within, an eye that sees in secret. He is saying that, whether we know it or not, we have the ability to perceive an invisible hidden dimension of life. We have the ability to see God where it might appear that God is absent. The fact that we may not perceive the presence of Christ in the church with the kind of power and immediacy Paul seems to suggest does not mean that Christ is absent. It only means that we are failing to use that *opthalmos* that sees the hidden realities of life. Whether we use this sixth sense or ignore it, we have within us a sixth organ of perception.

So, what is this sixth organ of perception?

The Greek word used to describe this organ in Ephesians 1:18 is *dianoia*. There is no exact English equivalent and any translation we might use has problems. *Dianoia* is most accurately translated as “mind.” The problem with using the English word “mind” to translate the Greek word *dianoia* is that when we think of “mind” we tend to think exclusively in terms of reason, thinking, brain activity. *Dianoia* includes the ideas of thinking, understanding, brain activity, and reason, but goes far beyond these concepts. *Dianoia* cannot be confined to our mental rational activities.

There is a temptation to think at times that, if we go to church and our minds are really stimulated by an intellectually challenging sermon, that we have encountered God. Or we may think when we go to a really thought-provoking lecture or bible study that we have met God. But, it may be that in fact all that has happened is that our brains have been stimulated. We may have been entertained, but we have not necessarily encountered the power of Christ at the heart of the church. If we are to know God in the way Paul suggests, we need to find something deeper than the mental activity of our brain.

The NRSV translation of the bible uses the word “heart” to translate *dianoia*. The problem with “heart” is that *dianoia* does not mean heart. The Greek word for “heart” is *kardia*. *Dianoia* is not *kardia*. When we talk of “heart” in our culture we tend to think of feelings. You have probably heard the statement, “She’s a heart and he’s a head.” This usually is intended to indicate that she’s all feeling and he’s all reason. *Dianoia* includes the idea of feeling but cannot be confined to the concept of feeling. When we see this inner organ of perception as simply associated with feelings, we run into all kinds of problems. We start to think that when we feel good, we are experiencing the presence of God. This is a disaster for churches. It leads to the attitude that when church me happy feelings it is full of the Spirit. When church does not give me happy feelings, it feels as if God is missing.

When I was being taught to preach in seminary, the predominant vision of preaching was that preachers should get into the pulpit and emote. So we were encouraged to tell deeply moving little stories that would bring a tear to the eye of our audience. You knew if you could make people cry, or laugh, or even better both in one sermon, you had really delivered the mother-load of sermons and everyone would go away knowing they had been in the presence of God. On the other hand if church leaves me bored, or even

irritated, then God is missing. But feelings are incredibly fickle and dangerously open to manipulation. The presence of God does not depend upon how you feel.

When we talk about *dianoia* we are talking about something deeper than feeling, something deeper than thinking. *Dianoia* is a deep inner knowing in your spirit. *Dianoia* is that organ within the depths of your being that has the capacity to know God. And the purpose of human existence is to become attuned to *dianoia*. The meaning and purpose of your existence do not reside in getting ahead in life or excelling at work. The purpose of the human journey is to discover the *dianoia* at the centre of our being and to grow in our ability to know God. You were created to know God and it is through the use of your *dianoia* that this knowing takes place.

So, how do we get in touch with our *dianoia*?

Here we need the final word in this little expression – “the eyes of your heart enlightened.” The Greek word translated as “enlightened” is *photizo*; it means to give light, to shine, light up, illumine. The verb *photizo* in Ephesians 1:18 is in the passive voice. Paul is saying here “as you let the light shine in your *dianoia*, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.” We do not cause the light to shine. We do not create the light that shines in our *dianoia*. We let the light shine. So, the question is how do we let the light shine in our *dianoia*.

The main bedroom in our house is high up at the top of the house facing east. It has a large east facing window. In the morning the sun blasts on the window of our bedroom, but is kept out of the room by thick curtains. When we pull back the curtain on a sunny morning the light floods into our bedroom.

Matthew’s Gospel, describing the moment of Jesus’ death says, “Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” (Matthew 27:50,51) Jesus opened the way to *dianoia*. Jesus restored our ability to gain access to that inner organ of divine perception within ourselves. Jesus restored in us the image of God in which we were originally created. All that remains is for us to throw open the curtain ourselves. The challenge of the Christian life is simply to open to the inner depths of our being. Christian life is not first about being good. It is not first about doing justice and working for the well-being of all humankind. Christian life is first of all about being open to the inner depths of our being where we live in intimate communion with God and then living in response to that reality.

So church exists to be a place where we are encouraged to open. Church exists to point us to the deeper inner reality where we know that life is more than what we perceive with our normal five senses. Church exists to remind us and encourage us to acknowledge that there is always another level of reality at work in all of life. There is a kind of parallel universe, an invisible realm of life that is always at work in us around us and throughout the world.

I think this is why the one thing Jesus commanded the church to do was to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Every Sunday in the vast majority of Christian churches around the world, the central act of the community is the celebration of the eucharist. In this service someone gets up in front of the congregation and take a tiny little wafer of bread and holds it up before the congregation and says some version of "On the night he freely gave himself to death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, 'Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you.'" Then that same person holds up a cup of wine and says, "After supper Jesus took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, 'Drink this, all of you: this is my blood.'"

And you are supposed to receive this little bit of wafer and this tiny sip of wine, and you are supposed to say, "This is crazy! This makes no rational sense at all. This does not taste like anything. It does not look like the body or the blood of Jesus. It doesn't feel like the body or blood of Christ." Then you are supposed to suddenly wake up to the fact that you are judging this experience from the wrong place within yourself. You are supposed to realize that you are using your five senses to judge the words of Jesus. You are trying to use your reason to make sense of Jesus standing before his friends, holding up a piece of bread and saying "This is my body." You are trying to feel your way around Jesus giving his friends a cup of wine and saying to them, "This is my blood."

If you are going to truly enter into the eucharist, you must open to *dianoia*, to that deeper way of knowing. You must allow the curtain of your being to open to that place within yourself where you can know that Christ comes to you in a tiny piece of bread and a little sip of wine. You must open to that place that experiences the reality that Christ is uniquely and powerfully present whenever his people gather, no matter how ridiculous it may seem, no matter how it may defy logic. Christ is here. He is among us. Our only task is to open and receive the awareness of his presence in our being.

The good news is that you know what this feels like. You know the experience of opening. And you know the experience of closing. You know the difference. You know what it feels like to soften and experience a deeper place within yourself. You know what it feels like to be gentle and to find the sweet quiet Spirit of God blow through your being. You know the experience of purity and goodness that is deeper and more real than any of the turmoil chaos or confusion that seems to characterize so much of our thinking and our feeling about life. The challenge of the church is to stay with that openness; stay with that depth, the authenticity. Keep open to that life-force within that is the presence of God. Keep open to the goodness and truth that lie at the source of your being. Listen more deeply to the true abiding steadfast love of God that is your true nature. Open and open again so that "the eyes of your inner most being may receive the light of God's living presence in this place."