

July 20th, 2008

The Truth We Seek

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Wisdom of Solomon 12.15, 18; Romans 8.26-27; Matthew 5.2-10

My great-aunt Gladys and great-uncle Arthur were driving from Louisiana to Arkansas to visit my grandparents one weekend. Uncle Arthur was doing the driving, and apparently was speeding. Sure enough, he was pulled over by a police officer. The police officer approached the car and she said to Uncle Arthur, "Sir, did you know you were speeding?" Uncle Arthur didn't have his hearing aids in, so he said to Aunt Gladys, "what did she say?" Aunt Gladys yelled, "She said you were speeding!"

**Next the police officer said, "Sir, I need to see your license?"
Uncle Arthur turned to Aunt Gladys and said, "What did she say?"
Aunt Gladys yelled, "She needs to see your license!"**

**The officer looks at Uncle Arthur's license, and says, "You're from Louisiana ; I once dated a guy from Louisiana who was the most annoying man I ever met."
Uncle Arthur looked at Aunt Gladys who just yelled, "She thinks she knows you!"**

Let's look at our readings.

In our first reading today, we hear a prayer. It comes from the book of Wisdom which was penned about 100 years before the birth of Jesus. It was written in Greek by an anonymous Jewish person living in Egypt . It is considered sacred scripture by Roman Catholics, but most Protestants regard it as optional reading.

The point I want to lift up this morning from the book of Wisdom comes from its first chapter. In the 7th verse of that chapter the writer tells us, "The spirit of the LORD fills the entire world, is ALL-embracing, and knows what every person is saying."

The spirit of the Lord fills the entire world and is all-embracing. It is with this confidence that the author then prays in chapter 12, saying, "You are just...but you judge with clemency, you govern us with lenience."

The writer is using different language than I might, but what he is affirming is that God is good, and that the goodness of God is accessible to us. After all, the spirit of the Lord fills the entire world and is all-embracing.

The second reading this morning comes from the Apostle Paul's letter to a faith community in Rome . Paul, who would have certainly known the book of Wisdom, agrees with the idea that God is an omnipresent Reality and that God's nature is infinite compassion and ultimate goodness.

Paul drives this point home throughout the 8th chapter of Romans. Paul says,

For those who are led by the spirit of God are children of God... The spirit Herself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God! (Rom. 8.14, 16)

We know that all things work for good for those who love God...(Rom. 8. 28)

What shall we say about all this? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8.31)

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or the sword?...No! In all these things we conquer overwhelmingly though the

one who loved us; for I am convinced that...nothing can separate us from the love of God... (Rom. 8. 35, 37-39).

Now, Paul says a lot of other things in chapter 8 that we could spend a two hour bible class unpacking, but in his social context, he is consistently making the case that God is present to us and is present as the Source of unlimited goodness. So accessible and so good is the “ground of being” that we call God, that Paul says even if we don’t know how to pray, the energy of the presence of God, the spirit prays for us, in us, in the language of unconditional love.

God’s will is for our good, and the spirit of perfect goodness is flowing through us, enfolding us, gently nudging us toward our highest good at all times. The “Spirit pleads for us...in harmony with God’s own will.”

I was at a conference this last week in Phoenix , AZ. It’s the International New Thought Alliance’s annual Congress, and it’s the most energizing conference I go to all year. If I could only go to one, that would be the one I would choose. Last week at the conference, the pastor of Hillside Truth Center in Atlanta , the Reverend Dr. Barbara King, told a story about the founder of Religious Science, Ernest Holmes.

One day at the Religious Science headquarters the Air Conditioning unit broke. The staff tinkered with it but couldn’t fix it, so they called in professionals to repair it, but they couldn’t do much with it either. Finally, someone had to break the news to Dr. Holmes that the A/C unit was too broken to fix. Dr. Holmes decided to pray about it.

His prayer went something like, “God, you have called me to do this important work and you know what we need to do it effectively.” And then he added the most profound line of any prayer I’ve ever heard. He said, “God, this is Ernest. Need I say more?”

Oh for the faith of the writer of the book of Wisdom, who knew that God is present, and God’s presence is Good.

Oh for the faith of St. Paul who knew that God is present, and God’s presence is actually praying in us, through us, for us, as us, calling for our Good even when we have no idea what that might be, even when outer conditions seem to be falling apart!

Oh for the faith of Ernest Holmes who so believed that God was so present to him as unconditional love and unlimited grace that his prayer for a miracle could simply be, “God, this is Ernest, need I say more?” Do you believe that God loves you, just as you are, so profoundly, that all you would ever need to pray is, “God, it’s me, need I say more?”

The psalmist wrote, “Where could I hide from your spirit, God? How could I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139.7)

Paul, quoting the poet Epimenides said, “It is in God that we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17.28)

One contributor to the New Testament wrote, “God is Love and WHOEVER lives in love lives in God and God lives in them.” (1 John 4.16)

Jesus said that God wasn’t limited to locations or certain groups of people, but rather, “God is spirit and those who worship God must do so in spirit and in truth.” (John 4.24)

They each used their own vocabularies and metaphors and symbols, but the ancient teachers, I believe, are in one accord in trying to get us to accept the unconditional love of God. God will not reject us, for any reason. Can we finally trust that and live in the joy that

such a belief offers? God with us, in us, expressing as us is love, and in the moments that we trust that, the fears just fade away.

We open our service each week by saying, “Here at the Sunshine Cathedral, we are seekers and students of Truth, empowered by Spirit, sharing the light with the world.” Why are we seekers instead of knowers? Because we’ve been taught to doubt God’s goodness and our own, so we continue to seek ways of embracing a bit more of the truth that God is truly Good. We are always seeking to embrace and internalize a bit more of that truth than we could yesterday, so that we can live in the power of joy a bit better than we did yesterday.

The truth that we seek isn’t a secret, or a dogmatic assertion, it’s simply that God is love and that God’s spirit of love is with us today and forever. And that truth, in whatever measure we can embrace it, is the light we are sharing with the world. I promise you, the world needs it.

Once we really believe that the Omnipresence that we call God is in truth the power of unconditional love, and that divine love excludes no one for any reason, that it fills us and flows through us and expresses as us and wants only Good for us, then we can say, “blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who long for justice, and those who are troubled in any way...,” because their problem isn’t the end of their story. God is with them, with us, dwelling within us, loving us, and no difficulty can ever take that truth away. This is the Good News. Amen.

God, this is N. Need I say more?
God, this is N. Need I say more?
God, this is N. Need I say more?
Amen.

“Since the life of God is everywhere present and fills all space and form, I know that life is expressing in an orderly manner within me.” – Irwin Gregg