

Sunday, November 26, 2017

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

The Way of Wisdom

Ephesians 1:15-23

INTRODUCTION:

Today's Scripture reading is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The city of Ephesus was located in what we now know as Turkey and at the time it was perhaps the most important city in Asia Minor. Perhaps this is why Ephesus was Paul's base of operations for over 2 years. Clearly he loved the city and the thriving church he started.

In this letter Paul seeks to expand our understanding of what it means to follow Christ and actually live in the fullness of God's acceptance, abundant grace and complete forgiveness. He emphasizes that we have been entirely redeemed by God, but not only for our own personal benefit, but also, so that we might reflect God's goodness to all people and in all aspects of our life.

Today's reading from Ephesians chapter 1 verses 15 through 23 is Paul's prayer for the Church. This is Paul's prayer for us at TriCon. He prays that God would give us deep understanding and a "spirit of wisdom" so that we might be fully enlightened by God's complete redemption and deeply rooted in this eternal hope for all humanity.

Hear this sacred prayer, lifted up to God on behalf of all of us here today. Paul writes...

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I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

I 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, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God 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, 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. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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Paul asks God for an amazing and critically important thing. He asks God to give us a “spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know him.” And his reason is that this wisdom and revelation will enlighten the eyes of our heart so that we may **know** what is the hope to which God has called us. What hope has God called you to? What hope is God calling TriCon Church to? Maybe we should seek this “spirit of wisdom”, for both personal and congregational enlightenment.

I love what Richard Rohr recently wrote in his daily blog. “Wisdom is not the gathering of more facts and information, as if that would eventually coalesce into truth. Wisdom is a way of seeing and knowing the same old ten thousand things but in a new way.” He also observes that, “wise people are those who are free to be truly present to what is right in front of them. It has little to do with formal education. Presence, he writes, is pretty much the same as wisdom!”¹

Let us begin by being truly present at this moment with open hearts, receptive minds and physical awareness of our bodies and breath. Let’s take a moment to center into the presence of God... (*Hold silence*)

Will you pray with me,

Our God of goodness and light, help us to expand our horizon in understanding the fullness of your presence among us and in us. May we know more fully your radiance and beauty so that we might live into the hope to which you have called us. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Happy New Year! Maybe you didn’t know it but today is the last Sunday of our church year. We have completed once again another revolution around the poetic circle that frames the defining narrative of the Christian Church. That is to say the poetic circle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. Or, if you prefer, order, disorder, reorder. Our church year is a reflection of the pattern repeated in all of creation. Over and over again in a yearlong cycle, we reinvent new ways to remember and retell this amazing and unlikely story. It’s the story of God’s self-disclosing revelation made visible in human form; Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Savior of

¹ cac.org/daily-meditation-november-23-2017

the World, Son of God.

Born through Mary, he grew to be a man who intimately experienced the full spectrum of what it means to be human. He knew love, friendship and family. He would bleed when cut and cry when in pain. He knew what is like to be hungry, to ache with desire, to feel overwhelmed by the world and fatigued by heavy demands. Like any of us, he too would sometimes get frustrated and angry. His heart would fill with joy and awe when moved by beauty and it would also break as he witnessed innocent suffering, oppression and injustice. He knew betrayal, grief and confusion. He even knew what it is like to feel completely abandoned by God. Jesus told us more about the nature and ways of God than we had ever known and unlocked hidden meaning contained in ancient Scriptures. He showed us how every human being is loved by God and created to live a full and happy life in unity with God, by loving God, loving one another and loving even our enemies. His teachings and behavior were consistently scandalous and radical and for many he was shockingly unorthodox. He lifted up the lowly, celebrated the marginalized and befriended the outcast. He redeemed the sinful and brazenly challenged the status quo of politics, power, social norms, and even religion itself. He comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable. Jesus completely turned the tables on who was in and who was out in the eyes of God. So it was inevitable that the power elite and dominant empire would find a way to silence this threat. They wrongfully arrested him, openly humiliated him, brutally tortured him and then publicly executed him along side other common criminals. But even here, enduring the pain and struggle of innocent suffering, Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them."

Jesus of Nazareth suffered greatly. He died an innocent man and was unceremoniously buried. His followers were utterly defeated, confused, grieving, frightened and angry.

Three days after witnessing his gruesome murder, they were gathered together, hiding, weeping and wondering when the empire would kill them too. Suddenly Jesus just appears to them in the flesh with his wounds still open and fresh. He tells them not to be afraid but to rejoice that God's love is more powerful than even death and resurrection awaits us all. He fills them with the mystical and mysterious power of the Holy Spirit and tells them to practice all that he taught them and tell everyone this good news of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

This is the amazing and unlikely story that we tell each year. Yet it is a story

that continues to resonate with fresh meaning and ongoing relevance even as we continue to struggle with humanity's existential purpose and internally battle to find and affirm our essential value in life, even as we are seduced and distracted by an insatiable appetite for more power, greater status, more control, easy affluence and comfort. Even as we crave a sense of personal security in a seemingly random world of suffering and uncertainty, we cling to the story of hope that God is actually our rock and our redeemer.

This is why the Church remains, to retell, reinterpret and reclaim this story of liberation, and radical hope for today. The Church universal began as the power of the Holy Spirit became manifest in the first followers of Jesus, and even today it is the Holy Spirit of the Living God within us that reveals the mystical truth of the Cosmic Christ. Christ is the one who was with God in the beginning, is with us now, and will come again. The church remains, not only as keepers of the story but also as Christ's body, here, alive in time and space. This is way more than simple metaphor. The church remains as a community of questioning believers who are filled with Divine Presence, Spirit fueled power, anointed agency and the fullness of God and Christ among us. Following in the Way of Jesus, we exist to proclaim this remarkable good news by telling and retelling the story and also imitating the Way of Jesus.

This is our enlightenment story that can only be seen with the eyes of the heart. With the eyes of the heart we gain a different sort of vision that is rooted deeply in the very center of our physical and spiritual life. Paul prays that we too might receive this "spirit of wisdom and revelation" as we learn more about God. This is the wisdom that views the same big data, worldly events and life circumstances, but in a new way. This wisdom is not predicated on intellectual ability, scholarly understanding or sophisticated philosophy. This is the *Sophia* wisdom of God. *Sophia* is the ancient Greek word for divine wisdom. It means a spiritual disclosure of truth concerning things unknown before. *Sophia* wisdom is like a lantern in a dark room. It is the awakening of an innate knowledge of ethical correctness and moral certitude in the realm of a divine truth. It is how we **know** the hope to which God has called us and can maintain our hope beyond every present condition. *Sophia* Wisdom allows us to hear the continual, deep, primal invitation to live peacefully, in joyous and confident expectation that God is with us and will love this world into salvation, despite our attempts to ignore or forget, or dismiss or rationalize this amazing and unlikely story away.

And so we begin to tell the story again next week. Advent one ignites our sacred hope as we begin to eagerly anticipate the story of *Sophia* Wisdom

breaking into time and space, coming to us as a helpless and vulnerable newborn infant, born to participate fully in the human circle of birth, life, death and rebirth. The life and teachings of Jesus was Sophia Wisdom in the flesh, affirming what we already knew deep inside, God is only Good, God is only Love, and in the end, Love can only win. This is the story of an endless hope that God offers all of us through the sacred spiritual wisdom of *Sophia*. This is God's continual invitation, to trust that the eyes of our heart can be opened. All we need do is humbly surrender to acceptance and begin again, and again and again to live fully in the light of hope.

Happy New Year people of God! Let's tell the story again. And this year, may God give us a spirit of Sophia Wisdom and revelation, so that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened, and we may **know** what is the hope to which we have been called. Amen?