

Draft Notes for Sermon
Sunday 4.25.10

More than chutzpah...
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Think of something you would like to happen.

Anything.

(Pause)

For me, I really had to think about it. In itself that was a bit surprising. One would think that if given the chance to have what you really wanted – that that “wish” would immediately pop into my mind. And that is part of the slow response –

The singular.

Even my original question was: “think of something you would like to happen.” I didn’t ask: “Think of all the things you wish would happen.” I asked it in the singular, in the specific – not because I planned it that way but because that’s the way it came out.

Thinking...

I’m not sure why that is so, but I wouldn’t be surprised to find out that the reason for it is that I’m afraid that if I ask for too much, I will be denied. I will be disappointed. I will be let down. Something I hope for will not happen...

So better not to hope. Don’t jinx it by asking for too much.

Part of it is that I have had to learn to curb my appetite and demand for things. It’s easy to get caught up in a civilization that has at its core in the Western Hemisphere this notion of “consumer-at-all-odds.” So I am cautious.

Next, think of something you would like to know. Ah, that’s a bit easier for me. All sorts of things come to mind. (No pun intended). And I think the reason for that is that I probably live in my head more than in the parts of me that are other than my mind.

I do get to those other places, but it requires that I pause and allow what comes to the surface to meet and sometimes pass what is in my thoughts.

The Spirit is not my mind. It may pass through, even guide it, but it is not contained there. So, when I think of what I know about the human condition and life; the truth that there will be lows, losses, sadness...sorrow – I don't ask for those things to be suspended, as much as for ways to deal with them from a place beyond the human condition of strength, joy, trust, faith, God --- all words that at best point to what I cannot capture for two reasons: my mind continues to fight for dominance in a society that is all about mind and because I cannot know God with this mind of mine alone.

There is an epic duel in my mind for dominance at the expense of refusing to submit to Spirit. It is not natural for the mind to give in to what it does not know. It is, to the mind, the classic non-sequitor. And depending on how much I identify with my thinking – well, therein lies the difficulty in coming up with what I would like to see happen in my lifetime.

Whenever I prepare for my Sunday comments, I look for ways to connect the readings with the lives we live today. I try to find some meaning for me and hope that there is some meaning for those who gather.

What is never lost on me, though, is that for all the similarities in the human condition that we share with the ancients, the times were different. There was more reliance on God in providing the outcome for events or seeing events as directed by God. That, too, has its pitfalls. If we saw every single thing that happened in life as directed by God – what a chaotic God we would imagine. One day happy, one day sad, one day loving, one day vengeful...actually, sounds a bit like the God of the First or Old Testament.

It's easy to see why literal interpretation of the Scriptures comes so readily to some. It is the proverbial black & white that provides solid footing in this mischigas of thinking, knowing, believing, trusting...risking. Still, even the literalists have to back away from certain teachings called for in the oldest of documents.

Yet, there is something going on in these readings. The first thing I always try to remember is that the writings tell a story. They are not meant to be documents of dogma. As a story, being spoken or read in the times to which they were attributed, they used the language and the references of the times. And, they are not meant to be historical. They are meant to provide grand landscapes against which God can be known in an ontological or broad presence. None of these writings, none of these writings contain God. God cannot be contained. Nor can what emanates from God...including all of God's creation.

Getting back to what I would like to happen or even what I would like to know about the future, I do think that we have lost something over time. I think, speaking for myself, that there is a certain "reservedness" in my adaptive self that

regularly tries to barge in on the examples of God's presence – and yes, even miracles – that are in abundance.

One of the earliest of church patriarchs, St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote in a major work called “Adversus Haereses” [Against Heresies] - 'Nihil cavum neque sine signo apud Deum' – “in God nothing is without meaning.”

In a time when God and State were in flux, when wars were fought on a grander scale than we have know – for God; when church leaders were also the rulers of States and Empires – everything was seen through the lens of God, whether for better or worse.

The oppression and marginalization that we work to change through laws and litigation were literally changed through uprisings and campaigns, pogroms, torture, death.

The movement that centered around the works of Jesus [teachings, presence, conversations, miracles, and more] the movement was entrenched in a struggle for freedom from oppression that was every bit as much life and death as it is today – except more people lost their lives in the pursuit.

What made them do such things?

There was something going on.

There was something going on when in Joppa, Peter raised Tabitha from her sleep. Then stayed with a certain Simon the tanner, who by all laws of the tradition would have had an unclean house with the scents and skins of bloodied animals.

There was something going on when John of Patmos wrote Revelation in these broad metaphorical strokes that paralleled the Roman Empire and all of its might as being nothing compared the Lamb. There was something going on in the promise to all who would have understood this for what it was, a righteous call to resistance and to a time when “They will hunger no more, and thirst no more, the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear in their eyes.”

There was something going on.

And so, too, was something going on when the leaders gathered around Jesus and said “How long will you keep us in suspense. If you are the Messiah tell us plainly.” Better translation: “How long will you continue to irritate us, annoy us with this talk and these followers and these parables...” always trying to catch him in some criminal offense against the throne or the law...

I have never known a miracle worker...but I am sure Jesus was one.

And I have never known a Messiah, nor do I think Jesus was one. In fact, what I have come to believe is that Jesus was more than a Messiah. God shared power with Jesus in some way that at the same time was more than the messiah and other than the traditional expectations of the messiah.

The translation in Greek of God being One with Jesus in John's writings of today is that God and Jesus were one, united in the work they do. There is an equality in John's writings between God and Jesus, not because Jesus said so (which would have been blasphemy) but because God's making shared the power with Jesus.

And with that shared power Jesus' works were seen by many and they believed.

I admit to needing to debunk some of the more misappropriated teachings of the Bible, especially against those who are marginalized and oppressed by the church. As a man who is gay I needed to engage that process in order to survive, frankly. I needed to know that the church was wrong on its teachings on exclusion as well as other areas.

And, for a time, I intellectualized it all, because it could be done and clear answers could be found that gave me and others a voice and comfort and courage in refusing to accept what was so wrong, heinous, and hurtful – antithetical to anything that could ever stand for or represent church.

And, that momentum carried me for a while into the continuing intellectualization of everything from what it all means to how the miracles were this or that. And, then, over time, I could not get any further.

I had gotten to the limits of what I could explain – or find answers to. I got to the sweet spot that wiped out my intellect, my mind, to knowing of, not containing or defining, but knowing of the presence of God, Jesus, and Spirit.

I got to the place learning how to rely on God without expectations for what I would like to see happen or even what I would like to know. And I still struggle with “me” in the mix, and I still struggle in the delicate balance of human decision and divine initiative in my response to it all.

But I so know that something is happening here...

And its more than just the chutzpah of a First Century itinerant preacher and convicted felon...

Thank God for that...