



**SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
SUNDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2020**

Becoming Truly Human and Christian: Seeing Through Two Eyes, not One



Let me take you back a-ways to Christmas and then work our way forward. The Bible tells us as much about human beings as it does about God. At Christmas we celebrate the incarnation, God becoming human: that is a commonplace. Seldom however, do we read things the other way: that in God becoming human, human beings become divine, as gods. In other words, it is a two-way street. The doctrine that articulates this extraordinarily high view of human beings is *theiosis*. The end-game for Christianity is not to simply hold to men and women as sinful – the often-negative perception of Protestantism – but that while we are broken, yes, we have a vocation, characterized by our God-given capacity for imagination and creativity.

After, Christmas, we entered into the season of Epiphany. Epiphany is really an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Christmas, of the incarnation. In short, the season of Epiphany points us to how we realize our divinity, our God-likeness: through the way we live, through the way we relate to each other and to the communities of which we are a part – our ethics. That was precisely the point during Epiphany of the Gospel's Matthew's Sermon on the Mount: "be salt, be light" and so on!

So, to be human is not to just be broken, a sinner but also to rise to the challenge to become divine through our thoughts and actions: a creative, imaginative ethics and morality.

But that is not all that needs to be said about us human beings. During this season of Lent, we continue exploring the human condition. Having celebrated our divine vocation, we now come to an understanding of our darker side – and there is a darker side – which is grounded in our anxiety. Last week, we heard the account of the temptations or "testing" of Jesus, all of which are summed-up in Jesus' anxiety about himself: his role, his failure or success. Today, we continue the journey, as we dig-deeper, as we think about the struggle we have as humans to see through "two-eyes" not just one.

OUR GATHERING

Nothing Can Trouble 820

Nada te turbe

1

Noth-ing can trou - ble; noth-ing can fright - en. Those who seek
 Na - da te tur - be, na - da te es - pan - te. Quien a Dios

2

God shall nev - er go want - ing. God a - lone fills us.
 tie - ne na - da le fal - ta. So - lo Dios bas - ta.

This meditative refrain from Taizé is based on a saying attributed to Teresa of Avila: "Let nothing trouble you; let nothing frighten you. All things are passing; God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever possesses God lacks nothing; God alone suffices."

TEXT: Attr. Teresa of Avila, 16th cent.; para. Taizé Community; Spanish, 1986; English, 1995
 MUSIC: Jacques Berthier, 1986
 Text and Music © 1991 Les Presses de Taizé (admin. GIA Publications, Inc.)

NADA TE TURBE
 Irregular

(also in Together In Song 739)

Welcome

In the name of the Father

In the name of the Son

In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with

And also with you

We light the Paschal Candle

Let's Sing: Jesus the name high over all (TiS 218, Lydia, C. Wesley)

Seeing with Two Eyes, Not One

In this meditation, I draw on the thinking of Andrew King, a liturgical poet. In alluding to the story of Nicodemus, our Gospel for today, I attempt to point out how Nicodemus is encouraged to begin looking at the world with two eyes, not just one, open to the imaginative Spirit of God, open to others, transcending a world-view that limits him to a binary “us/them” perspective.

You are returning from seeing the head rabbi, from Nazareth,
 making your way past
 doorways of shadows,
 past the street corners'
 intersecting griefs,
 where ghosts lean out
 to question the sky lit by
 the same stars that held
 promise for Abraham
 so long ago.

Years ago, you stopped asking the stars for clarity.
 Long ago your heart
 became evening, grey and empty,
 finding restitution
 in rules, laws, decrees and imperatives.
 Seeing the world through just one eye,
 through the lens of us and them, them and us.

Grounded in legislation,
 your saddened expression asks
***will our dying hopes
 be lifted?
 When, O Lord, will
 we see new life?***

But, tonight you meet a new rabbi:
 this one who breaks patterns,
 this challenger of authority,
***“Be born of the Spirit, of the wind,
 see the kingdom of God” – he tells you***

as if to say that
 the kingdom
 you long for is

not a thing that you touch
as much as something
that touches you.

Can words become stars
of fresh promise?
Can the wind bring
new breath to the earth?
Can someone whose heart
ceased dreaming long ago,
begin again, listening tonight?

Doorways still hold onto shadows.
Streets remain
intersected by grief.
Your mind remains filled
with many questions.
But the fragrant air is moving.

Peace

Lent Event: Ambon

Twenty years ago, religious conflict broke out in Ambon, a region of Indonesia, just north of Timor Leste. My colleague in Uniting World who was responsible for the region and was trained in conflict resolution, spent months there, off and on for several years. What has flowered from that process of conflict resolution has been a new community where Muslims and Christians now work together, addressing that which afflicts them both: poverty and its accompanying lack of opportunity. Let's listen to the story of healing told by two former adversaries – Attika and Mary.

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Sayings about Seeing through Two Eyes, Not One

Humans have binocular vision, meaning that the single image we see in our minds, is made up from two different views: one from each eye. Binocular vision gives us two advantages: first, we see more widely than if we had just one eye. Second, we see with greater depth.

David Rudd Cycleback

You can become blind by seeing each day as a similar one. Each day is a different one, each day brings a miracle of its own. It's just a matter of paying attention to this miracle. **Paulo Coelho**

Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others. **Jonathan Swift**

There is no 'them' and 'us.' There is only us. **Greg Boyle SJ**

To realize one's inner being, involves not just breaking ecstatically through a set of external barriers, but rather, the more exacting business of emancipating ourselves from ourselves.

Terry Eagleton

Genesis 12:1-4a (The Good News Version)

The story of Abraham being called to venture forth to a new land, has been seen with reason as the clearest metaphor for the Christian journey of faith: in fact, it is this same metaphor which is used in the Uniting Church's Basis of Union. That said, this reading carries enormous weight in the Hebrew Bible, as it marks a movement from an inclusive reading of Yahweh's grace, involving the whole of creation (Genesis 1-11), to a more exclusive thrust, directed to Israel in particular. From this point, the tension between God's grace understood inclusively and exclusively becomes an issue. What is interesting here, is that the story in Genesis speaks of negotiation and cohabitation with the original inhabitants of the space that the Hebrews came to inhabit (Genesis 21:25-34), as opposed to that in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 7:1-12), which is altogether more disturbing and violent. The suggestion in the Genesis account is that even divine promises, as compelling as they may be for the recipients, do not justify violence upon others. Grace as a social good, may not be construed brutally.

12 The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. ² I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
But I will curse those who curse you.
And through you I will bless all the nations."^[a]

⁴ When Abram was seventy-five years old, he started out from Haran, as the LORD had told him to do; and Lot went with him.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Psalm 121 (Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition)

Psalm 121 and the others around it, are often referred to as Psalms of Ascent or psalms of pilgrimage. Central to these psalms is the conviction of God's care for us. In this psalm the words 'the Lord will keep you' function almost as a mantra. Their repetition undergirds the assurance. The words spoken to the psalmist promise the Lord's protection at every turn, at every moment. But the psalmist also knows and proclaims in other places that even one who is faithful does not attain a life protected from all harm in every situation (e.g. Psalm 17). Many lament psalms arise out of innocent suffering. Nevertheless, the simple assurance of Psalm 121 has the power to strengthen the believer to face many difficulties and hardships. The prayer of the psalmist is then not limited by experience and circumstance. They assert the possibility of trusting *against* the grain of experience. While the promise of the Lord's protection and presence can be understood neither simplistically nor literally, trust in that promise is grounded in a reality that goes beyond experience. It is grounded in the Lord as creator and in the fact that the larger community of faith has discovered the Lord as one in whom trust can be placed

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
 From whence does my help come?
² ***My help comes from the LORD,
 who made heaven and earth.***
³ He will not let your foot be moved,
 he who keeps you will not slumber.
⁴ ***Behold, he who keeps Israel
 will neither slumber nor sleep.***
⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
 the LORD is your shade
 on your right hand.
⁶ ***The sun shall not smite you by day,
 nor the moon by night.***
⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil;
 he will keep your life.
⁸ ***The LORD will keep
 your going out and your coming in
 from this time forth and for evermore.***

John 3:1-17 (The Message)

This is perhaps the most famous reading in John's Gospel, perhaps even the New Testament. Often the whole piece is read in the light of verse 16, but it is broader than that. In essence, it is John's way of speaking about a spirituality and psychology that sees God in all of life, not just the bits we are comfortable with. Nicodemus is challenged to see both reality and God through two eyes, not just one.

3 ¹⁻² There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said,

“Rabbi, we all know you’re a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren’t in on it.”

³ Jesus said, “You’re absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to—to God’s kingdom.”

⁴ “How can anyone,” said Nicodemus, “be born who has already been born and grown up? You can’t re-enter your mother’s womb and be born again. What are you saying with this ‘born-from-above’ talk?”

⁵⁻⁶ Jesus said, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

⁷⁻⁸ “So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”

⁹ Nicodemus asked, “What do you mean by this? How does this happen?”

¹⁰⁻¹² Jesus said, “You’re a respected teacher of Israel and you don’t know these basics? Listen carefully. I’m speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing second-hand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don’t believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can’t see, the things of God?”

¹³⁻¹⁵ “No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of

Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: She sits like a bird (TIS 418, Thainaky, John L. Bell and Graham Maule)

A Movie Clip: “Silence” (2016)

The film *Silence* by Martin Scorsese is about the moral burden of faith. The film tells the story of two Portuguese priests, Sebastião Rodrigues, played by Andrew Garfield, and Francisco Garupe, played by Adam Driver, who travel to Japan in the 17th century to discover what happened to their missing mentor—Cristóvão Ferreira, played by Liam Neeson—who reportedly committed apostasy after being tortured by the Japanese government. (At that time, Christianity was outlawed in Japan.) Along the way, they find villages full of peasants who have converted under the guidance of previous missionaries, all of whom have died or been driven from the country. Because it is so dangerous to openly practice the religion, the two priests must minister to these nascent Christians in the dead of night, hearing confession and celebrating mass under the cover of darkness. Rodrigues and Garupe, witness the incredible price these converts must pay for their newfound faith. Imperial officers routinely come through the villages and challenge residents to denounce Christianity by stepping on a plate depicting Jesus. Eventually, the two Jesuits are apprehended, and they, too, are asked to renounce their saviour. As long as they resist, the Japanese officials will keep murdering more peasants.

Some thoughts...

Let’s Give

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
 praise him, all creatures here below,
 praise him above, ye heavenly host,
 praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

The one who prays ends each series of petitions to God with the words, “ May we see you, ourselves and the world with two eyes” and the people respond, “May we become more human and Christian”.

Song: In Christ alone my hope is found

(Words and music by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, copyright © 2001 Kingsway Thankyou Music)

“In Christ alone my hope is found;
 He is my light, my strength, my song;
 This cornerstone, this solid ground,
 Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
 What heights of love, what depths of peace,
 When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
 My comforter, my all in all—
 Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
 Fullness of God in helpless babe!
 This gift of love and righteousness,
 Scorned by the ones He came to save.
 Till on that cross as Jesus died,
 The wrath of God was satisfied;
 For ev’ry sin on Him was laid—
 Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
 Light of the world by darkness slain;
 Then bursting forth in glorious day,
 Up from the grave He rose again!
 And as He stands in victory,
 Sin’s curse has lost its grip on me;
 For I am His and He is mine—
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death—
 This is the pow’r of Christ in me;
 From life’s first cry to final breath,
 Jesus commands my destiny.
 No pow’r of hell, no scheme of man,
 Can ever pluck me from His hand;

Till He returns or calls me home—
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.

Blessing

May we see with two eyes, not just one.
May we discern the spirits
May we read the signs of the times
And channel our desire for *Christ's* purposes

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

Nothing can Trouble (TIS 739, Teresa of Avila, Taizé)

Closing Postlude