

“Epiphany”

The Rev. Drew Willard
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2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-43

‘The people were stubborn, and something still keeps them from seeing the truth when the Law is read.

Only Christ can take away the covering that keeps them from seeing.’

2 Cor. 3:14

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to see you – help us to see your countenance of light.

Smile on us, that we may share our smile with others.

Amen

Quite a few years ago, the Sunday comics in some newspapers, included a “Magic Eye” cartoon.

The technical name is an “autostereogram” that creates an optical illusion when you look closely at 2-dimensional patterns,

then slowly back away until your eyes “diverge”;

Then all of a sudden, you can see a 3-dimensional shape.

Now, you must be in a well-lit room for it to work.

An example of this would be repetitive patterns of ocean waves, out of which, a 3-D image of a fish comes into view.

It’s really amazing how such a thing could be created and work like it does –

literally a maze of patterns printed on paper

in which is hidden an image with such clarity.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_Eye

I am reminded of something my 6th Grade Sunday School teacher said about the Kingdom of God being like a darkened room

in which the contents are not visible until you turn on the light – the light of your faith.

Not easy to do these days – that is if the TV and internet are your only windows to the world.

Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic monk and author, said that,

“We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time...”

Perhaps, this idea is like those Magic-Eye cartoons,

when we get out of the house and into the natural world and can see a vision of God’s handiwork emerge.

Our Gospel lesson is about such a vision that takes place for the disciples, on top of a mountain, recalling the events of Moses’ encounter with God on Mt. Sinai...

Willard, p.2

For 40 days and 40 nights, God met with Moses on the mountain,
teaching him face to face, and guiding the preparation
of a pair of stone tablets with the Ten Commandments.

Upon his return, the Israelites were terrified because Moses' appearance
was changed – his skin had become radiant;

So, he wore a veil of some kind as a covering to calm his people down.

In our lesson from 2 Corinthians today, the Apostle Paul said this covering
was used to hide the fading of this radiance

perhaps to maintain a sense of mystery among the people.

This covering may have been a mask that Moses used to represent
the mystery of God when he was teaching the Law.

This idea of mystery – that there are truths yet to be revealed,
is evident in Jesus' words of Matt. 13:35...

'This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet:

"I will open my mouth in parables,

I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

According to literary and historical author, Rene Girard,

'what has been hidden since the foundation of the world...' has been revealed
and it is right here in the Bible and the Christian tradition.

Rather than decoding or demythologizing the Bible

as contemporary theologians have been doing,

Girard says that the Bible has decoded the world's mythologies.

A summary of his theory is this:

Christ has broken the vicious cycle of naming, blaming, and shaming
that we do to one another, while masking our envy and competition.

However, his theories are quite complex

and touch on a broad range of cultural issues;

and it is taking me a while to get a sense of what he is saying,

like looking at one of those Magic-Eye pictures,

with the patterns right in front of you – until you see a pattern emerge...

He says we are in the midst of an 'Apocalypse' – in the sense of "revelation"
in which things hidden right in front of us are being revealed.

He asserts that Jesus did not come to bring peace, but a 'sword' –
which is to be understood as a metaphor.

Jesus is in opposition with human culture – it is a "fight",
but by using nonviolent means.

Willard, p.3

The whole Bible – beginning with Genesis and up through to Revelation,
is a ‘countermyth’ to the traditions and mythologies of ‘archaic religions’.

Rene Girard contends that all cultures are founded on violence –
such that there was some crisis in a society’s past
in which a real person was sacrificed for the sake of the group,
and later, the event was ritualized with an animal as a substitute.

Girard says this mechanism begins with imitating a rival, wanting what they want,
wanting to take their place, and to be them – envy.

In this way, the world of humanity is in competition,
everyone against everyone else, rivals for the same things.

Triggering violence, this situation would go spiraling out of control,
if it wasn’t for someone being singled out as a scapegoat to be
punished, exiled, or killed, establishing a kind of peace – a false peace.

Another factor of his theory is that desire is something we get from other people –
we want something because they want it, imitating their desire.

In Genesis – the very first book of the Bible,
Eve gets the desire for the forbidden fruit from the serpent,
and she passes on the desire – and not just the “apple”, to Adam, as well.

The first murder in the Bible – where Cain kills Abel,
is out of envy.

The 10 brothers of Joseph conspire against him – originally to kill him,
out of envy.

The real problem is that we are blind to our own complicity in this mechanism,
thinking it is justified to violently punish someone else.

We get caught up in mob mentality.

Christianity has been guilty of this, too, throughout its history –
with the Crusades and Inquisition being the worst examples,
but Rene Girard acknowledges Christ as the one through whom
this cycle has been revealed – and who showed us what to do about it.

Girard stands firm that Christianity with all its tradition and theology –
despite its history, is to be thanked for revealing what can be done.

According to Girard, sacrifice was necessary for society
to keep violence from getting out of hand –
because it serves to limit violence by assuaging the mob mentality,
defusing the call for revenge.

But with Christ, we have an example we can safely follow – and imitate.
Though Christ allowed himself to be sacrificed violently,
we are called to sacrifice ourselves, nonviolently,
through forgiveness and love.

Willard, p.4

On the mountaintop,
the disciples witness Jesus transformed with a radiant light,
while standing in the presence of Elijah and Moses –
both warriors of the faith in a literal sense.

But the voice of God says,
“Listen to him!” Listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus and follow his example
of nonviolent confrontation.

And when they go back down from the mountaintop of revelation,
they enter a valley and a frightening situation for people back then –
mental illness characterized as a demon-possessed child.
Yet these disciples would see that what was said on that mountaintop of glory
was true in the darkest valley, so that even that demon
had to listen and obey, releasing the child.

Rene Girard makes the point that Jesus does not bring peace,
but confronts the opponents of peace
and disrupts their social system “shell games”
that keep people enslaved.

He says, “No” to the mob,

but does this non-violently and fearlessly.

He enters regions like darkened rooms and turns the light of insight on,
and he calls us all out into the middle of that room
to get involved in the Big Dance!

To dance in this way is to believe that God’s Kingdom of Heaven
is already possible as a Beloved Community
whether we ever get there as a social reality, or not in this life.

We have a challenge before us, now, as a community –

I received an e-mail message from

Rob Michaels of the Tri-County Interfaith Alliance to this effect:

The Lake County School Board will be meeting tomorrow night at 6:00 pm
at the courthouse in Tavares to discuss an important issue.

*“Rather than allow an anti-bullying group,
The Gay-Straight Student Alliance, to form and meet
in Carver Middle School,
they are proposing to ban all clubs in Lake County schools
from meeting.”*

What this could mean is that gay students, especially,
would be scapegoated as troublemakers –
blamed for the cancellation of all clubs, and
they could be specifically targeted for bullying.

Willard, p.5

On the other hand, scapegoating the School Board as unjust
would likely just lead to an impasse.

What is the common for all parties is a climate of competition and fear,
and the only hopeful response is to confront each side with their humanity
to disarm each other with empathy
and replace a culture of competition with a culture of love.

Thomas Merton said,

“There are crimes which no one would commit as an individual
which he willingly and bravely commits when acting
in the name of his society...”

He goes on to say that people who might otherwise be

“kind, tolerant, civilized and even humane”,
can take on “a special deformity of conscience
as a result of their identification with their group,
their immersion in their particular society.”

<http://www.octanecreative.com/merton/quotes.html>

Like looking at the patterns of the Magic-Eye,
when we make the effort, we can see something there .

When patterns of mob psychology take over,
to hypnotize even well-meaning people,

Christ challenges us to step back and say, ‘No’ to the mob.

Though sacrifice has served as a way to keep violence from escalating,
Jesus challenges us to sacrifice pride by non-violent/direct confrontation.

The world is still a very violent place, but Christ challenges us with a better way.

The situation before us with the Lake County School Board,
could splinter into scapegoating when the real enemy is
fear and the mechanisms of power and envy.

Helping people to see their humanity in one another
is to imitate Christ, and not the violent avenger.

Creating a culture of forgiveness and love is to allow a vision of Christ
to appear in the valleys of life as well as the mountaintops.

Like Pastor John Robinson said to the Pilgrims as they set out for the New World,

*"I Charge you before God and his blessed angels
that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow Christ.*

*If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His,
be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth
from my ministry,*

*for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light
yet to break forth from His holy word.*

Amen

*Our lesson today comes from 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
in which the Apostle Paul says that salvation had been a mystery
until it was revealed in the words and actions of Christ.*

This wonderful hope makes us feel like speaking freely.

We are not like Moses. His face was shining,
but he covered it to keep the people of Israel from
seeing the brightness fade away.

The people were stubborn,
and something still keeps them from seeing the truth
when the Law is read.

Only Christ can take away the covering that keeps them from seeing.

When the Law of Moses is read,
they have their minds covered over with a covering
that is removed only for those who turn to the Lord.

The Lord and the Spirit are one and the same,
and the Lord's Spirit sets us free.

So our faces are not covered.

They show the bright glory of the Lord,
as the Lord's Spirit makes us more and more
like our glorious Lord.

God has been kind enough to trust us with this work.

That's why we never give up.

We don't do shameful things that must be kept secret.

And we don't try to fool anyone or twist God's message around.

God is our witness that we speak only the truth,
so others will be sure that we can be trusted.

Luke 9:28-43a

- [28] Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.
- [29] And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white.
- [30] And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Eli'jah,
[31] who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.
- [32] Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they wakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.
- [33] And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah" – not knowing what he said.
- [34] As he said this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.
- [35] And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"
- [36] And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.
- [37] On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.
- [38] And behold, a man from the crowd cried, "Teacher, I beg you to look upon my son, for he is my only child;
[39] and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him till he foams, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him.
[40] And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."
- [41] Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."
- [42] While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.
- [43] And all were astonished at the majesty of God...