

Message: "What Lies Beyond Knowledge"

Scripture Lesson: I Corinthians 2:1-16

2When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

6Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"— 10these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. 14Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 16"For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Sometimes there lingers out there in the everyday world of human understanding a phrase, a saying, a quip, or a quote that captures exactly what a scripture lesson is trying to get across. Lucky for me and all of us gathered here today, I came across just such a quote, just such a statement that perfectly aligns with today's passage from Paul, which is a rather complicated affair as you just heard. So sit back, and listen to a clarifying reduction of I Corinthians 2:1-16 (perhaps this might sound a bit.....familiar?):

"Space... the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise, its five-year mission... to explore strange new worlds... to seek out new life and new civilizations... to boldly go where no one has gone before."

There it is - the final frontier! The last of the mysteries, the edge of the horizon of history, the discoverable realities in the future that have yet to be understood! There's an immense universe out there, awaiting to be discovered by brilliant minds and advancing technologies and passionate motivations, full of

strange new worlds with new life and new civilizations, inviting us to boldly go where no one has gone before - the final frontier.

Except - that's not really THE final frontier, if we think about it. The final frontier which is essentially the purpose of the starship Enterprise is analogous to the purpose humans identify with on all levels - to increase in knowledge, to learn more about ourselves and our world, to explore the vastness of the cosmos with telescopes and radar antennae and spaceships and habitation modules.....there is so very much out there for us to discover in this final frontier.

But as to it being the final frontier, I find that Paul would take great issue with this understanding. He is adamant in his quarrel with this interpretation of the mysteries that confront us as human beings. For there are two different types of mysteries before us - the first type of mystery humans face are those embodied in the physical universe, the type identified by Star Trek as the final frontier as mysteries approachable and discoverable by humans, at least conceptually - science and astrophysics, galaxies and nebula, biology, chemistry, mathematics; we have a host of tools and processes and equipment to explore the universe around us. We approach that type of mystery.

But what about the type of mystery that approaches us? This is a second type of mystery that is absolutely beyond and inaccessible to the human creature left to itself, dependent entirely upon something greater than ourselves or any faculty, resource, or capacity we have within ourselves. Paul is careful to outline the difference between what is possible for us to know on our own, verses that which is completely outside of our own ability to know **save as it is made known to us by another**.

Paul uses these words to speak about this mystery that God makes accessible to us: "we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"— ¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

This is truly the final frontier - not to boldly go where no one has gone before, but to boldly allow the mystery of and beyond the universe to speak to us.

An experience with our granddaughter yesterday comes to mind. Our three year old granddaughter Alva has been sick this week with a very persistent cough and bad congestion. Not covid, but yucky nonetheless. In connecting with our

daughter Molly, I did what all grandparents do when we hear our grandchild is sick - I became a doctor full of advice. "Are you giving her lots to drink? How are you doing with children's Tylenol? Does she have her favorite teddy bear to snuggle?" Honey-lemon tea, frozen popsicles, good children's movies to watch when sick, warm slippers, the best brand of lotion-infused Kleenex tissues that are soft on raw noses - I deluged her with advice and counsel on how to take care of our granddaughter (and, yes, they were doing all of these things already!).

But another thing grandparent doctors do is visit, so Terri and I planned to show up in team support mode. On the way to their home, we stopped by a local pharmacy to pick up medicine for Molly, who had become sick as well. And while at the pharmacy, one of us had the brilliant idea of getting a gift for Alva, something she would not expect, to break up her day of lounging on the couch, feeling bad (I wonder if you can guess which one of us had the brilliant idea? That's right, Terri). We found an inexpensive little toy box full of little gizmos - a rubic's cube, plastic animals, a squishy ball, things like that; things she wouldn't expect.

Well, we showed up at their home; upon entering, Alva let us know in her own three-year-old words, "I don't feel very well." She looked kind of miserable, even though she was getting better. We talked about things for a bit, checked on how Molly was doing, but then we mentioned to Alva we had something for her - and her eyes grew wider. They grew wider still as we pulled out that little toy box. That was the end of our interaction with Alva, for she was mesmerized, pulling out the little trinkets and discovering new things she hadn't been expecting. I'm not sure, but I think it was good medicine for her.

Maybe this is a good way to think about God and God's constant offering of gifts that we cannot come up with on our own, gifts that may wonderfully surprise us if we are open to being surprised by them and taking them into our lives. And our God is a gift-giving God, although the gifts God shares may at first be hard to receive. There is comfort and guidance and nurture and mercy, but there is also challenge and sacrifice and humility and confession. Yet, there is greater need for what God offers us than what we can come up with on our own; and this goes for discovering not only that God is, but who God is, which God must share on God's own terms. Receiving such gifts requires a life open to God.

The point is this: There is a great difference between what we are able to discover and know ourselves, and what must be revealed to us by another, which require an open life to receive.

Flannery O'Connor was an American novelist, short story writer and essayist who was a devoted member of the Roman Catholic church. She had this to say about the mystery of God that requires a life open to God: "I think there is no suffering greater than what is caused by the doubts of those who want to believe. I know what torment this is, but I can only see it, in myself anyway, as the process by which faith is deepened. A faith that just accepts is a child's faith and all right for children, but eventually you have to grow religiously as every other way, though some never do. What people don't realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross. It is much harder to believe than not to believe. If you feel you can't believe, you must at least do this: keep an open mind. Keep it open toward faith, keep wanting it, keep asking for it, and leave the rest to God."

Why are there so many people who either live in the shallowness of simplistic faith or deny God's existence altogether? Real faith, faith worthy of life, **REQUIRES AN OPEN LIFE** - a mind open to the mysterious, the unfathomable, the illogical and irrational, a heart open to wonder, question, and mystery regarding the "why" of it all.....these represent the deeper regions where God lives and from where God reveals God's deeper self to those who are open. It's why we talk a lot in this church about opening our minds and hearts towards God, for without openness, God can't get through, no matter what eloquence we use, no matter the quality of our singing or praying or ritual - if the heart and mind aren't open towards God, God can't get in - and God always wants in.

Knowledge can take us far; faith can take us farther. Knowledge alone leads to a life requiring carefully defined parameters for meaning and value; faith retains such parameters but is able to exceed them as well. It is tempting to think of knowledge as more consistent than faith, but in this twisted world of alternative facts, opinion shouting louder than evidence, and skewed thinking on all fronts, it is perhaps the more dependable life that looks beyond what can be known, and more towards who is to be trusted.

My shelter dog rescued me.....

I'm not sure if I've shared a particular experience of my past with you here, so if this sounds familiar, my apologies. It was a time when I was enrolled at the University of Colorado, pursuing a degree in Engineering Physics. A squared Bartlett.....