

AN ENLIGHTENED HEART

(08/2717)

Scripture Lesson: Ephesians 1:1-23

Luke 6:27-36

“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 he 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.”

This morning we are continuing our focus on some passages and themes from Paul’s letters. A few weeks ago we looked at Paul’s letter to the Galatians. We are now turning our attention to the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. This is a profound letter, full of little gems that teach us about God and give us resources for finding a fullness of life as Christians.

As we read these passages we should remember that this is a letter from a pastor to his church. It is pedagogic, a teaching, but it also expresses Paul’s deep love for his people and his concern for their salvation. In addition to being a great theologian, Paul was a good pastor.

Paul says that he was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ “by the will of God,” not by his own desire or ambition. This is the mark of a true call. As you are well aware, not all pastors are truly called to the Christian ministry. Not all religious leaders are called to their positions of authority. You can usually tell the ones who are from the ones who aren’t.

Paul addresses “the saints who are in Ephesus.” At the time Paul wrote this letter, the church had not begun the process of canonizing saints. When Paul uses the term “saints” he is not speaking of the giants in the history of our religious tradition. He is speaking to his parishioners. He is speaking to us. He is telling us that we are saints.

Lest we get all puffed up at the idea that we are saints, I think Paul means “potentially” saints. Paul immediately offers a disclaimer or condition: he tells us that the saints are those “who are faithful in Christ Jesus.”

We should note that Paul does not describe a saint as one who has lived a perfect life, one who has done or is doing great deeds, or one who performs miracles like miraculously healing someone or walking on water. A saint is one who is faithful. A

saint is one who is “in” Christ Jesus. This is a powerful choice of prepositions. The faithful are “in” Christ Jesus just as Jesus promised that after we die he will “take us into” himself, that where he is we may be also. Paul is telling us that we don’t need to wait until we die to be “in Christ Jesus,” to be where he is. We can be “in” Christ Jesus today.

Paul goes on to talk about the blessings that come to those who are saints. The saints, those who are faithful in their relationship with Christ Jesus, may not be blessed with material wealth, but they are rich in the spirit. Paul tells us we are already blessed, already gifted by God. All we need to do is realize it.

Some people remind themselves of this by keeping a “blessings journal.” They spend some time at the beginning of every day writing down what they experience as God’s blessings. If we did this, we would probably be surprised at how blessed we really are. Also, after listing all our blessings, the little aches and pains, the people who are annoying or the things that don’t go as we planned wouldn’t seem that overwhelming.

Paul then raises the theme or the allegory of adoption. He tells us that because God has adopted us as his children through Christ, we have redemption as God’s own children. I think when Paul uses the word “redemption” or “redeemed,” he means that things are restored to their proper position.

What is our true or proper position? It is to be children of God. When we live in sin, when we are self-centered and caught up in grasping, we are not in our true state. When we cherish a false sense of superiority, when we feel superior to people of different races, ethnic groups, or religions, when we look down on our brothers and sisters, we are not in our true state. We find ourselves beset by anxiety, anger, and a fruitless addiction to power and control over other people and ourselves. This is what it means to be fallen.

To be redeemed is to be restored to our true state, to be restored to our right mind. When we are redeemed, our lives are not centered in ourselves but in God. This leads us into a caring, compassionate, and peace-filled life. Our faith will give rise to works.

Finally, God gives thanks for the faithfulness of his parishioners in Ephesus, for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for the love they show to each other. This is a reminder of what the church is all about. We are called to deepen our relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are also called to love one another.

Jesus tells us that it is easy to love people who love us. He tells us that it is easy to accept people who look like us and believe what we believe. This requires no great act of faith. It is much more difficult to accept and even love those who are difficult or annoying. It is much more difficult to accept and love people who are not like us, those who are the pariahs of our society. It is much more difficult to accept and love those whom Jesus refers to as “the least of these,” yet this is exactly what Jesus calls us to do.

Paul then tells us how we can do this. We are not called to undertake this kind of Christian outreach as an onerous task. We are called to actually experience a depth and breadth of love that finds expression in acts of caring and compassion. How can we do this? Here is what I think is the true gem, the true gold of Chapter 1. Paul tells us that we need to see “with the eyes of our heart enlightened.”

We know that we see with our eyes. Did you know that we can also see through our heart, and that the two ways of seeing, the two ways of thinking might not be the same? Blaise Pascal, in his *Pensees*, writes of an *intelligence du coeur*, an intelligence of the heart. Pascal tells us that this is a type of intelligence “of which the brain knows nothing.”

There are two ways of seeing. When we see through the lens of our ego, we see the world from our own perspective, through the lens of self-concern. This leads us to be critical and judgmental of those who are different from us or who do not meet our needs.

The other way of seeing is seeing through God’s eyes. When we do this, we see others as Christ sees them. We see our husband or wife, our children, our parents, even our stupid and annoying relatives or fellow parishioners as Christ sees them. When we do this, we are seeing “with the eyes of our heart enlightened.” We then are able to discover or rediscover Christ not only in “the least of these,” but also in those close to us.

This is what it means to be enlightened. It means to see “with the eyes of our heart enlightened.” It means to see other people as God sees them. It means to see ourselves as God sees us. It means to see through the eyes of love.

Paul calls us to remember who we are. We are children of God, made in the image of God. Christ, as the Holy Spirit, dwells within us. There is an interesting parallel here in the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism teaches that we need to experience what is called *bodhichitta*, which roughly translates as enlightenment,

as in an enlightened heart and mind, as in an awakened heart. *Bodhichitta* is the experience of an open, kind, and compassionate heart. It is the opposite of the views that were espoused by white supremacists in their hate rally in Charlottesville last week.

Tibetan Buddhism teaches that *bodhichitta* is a hidden potential in every one of us. It is like a diamond that has been covered by mud. If we remove the mud, the diamond shines forth in all its glory. All we have to do is wash the mud off, the mud of our egocentric, selfish, and self-serving focus, the mud that causes so much suffering for us and for those around us. Like a precious diamond, like the “pearl of great price,” like the “treasure hidden in the field” *bodhichitta* is always there. It is our deepest, truest nature. In Christian terms, it is our soul.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, when we experience *bodhichitta* within ourselves, we will immediately realize that this spark of divinity is also within every other human being, in fact, within every sentient being. To see this spark of divinity within everyone, or as a Christian would say to see Christ in everyone, is to “see with the eyes of our heart enlightened.”

Paul then closes this first chapter of his letter by wishing his parishioners *shalom*, the experience of peace. This is what Christ promises to all who are faithful in him: the “peace that passes all understanding.”

As we go through life we can see everything and everyone with our normal, everyday eyes. If we do, I daresay we won’t see very much. If, however, we can see through the eyes of faith, if we can see with the eyes of our heart, if we can see with the eyes of our heart enlightened, we may be able to glimpse Christ in the strangest places and people.

If we can see “with the eyes of our heart enlightened,” we will see other people differently. If we see “with the eyes of our heart enlightened,” we will also see ourselves differently. We will see others and ourselves through the eyes of love. If we experience this, the greatest of all God’s blessings, the blessing of an enlightened heart, we will truly transform or redeem our lives, our families, our church, and the world in which we live.

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