

## AN ENLIGHTENED HEART

(07/09/2023)

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.”*

A few weeks ago, at Pentecost, we explored what it might mean to experience the Holy Spirit within us. The apostle Paul, in his letters to the early churches, gives us some hints. He tells us that when this happens, we will experience, we will incarnate what he calls “the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul describes one of these gifts. It is a precious gift, a gift that is meant not only for us, but also for the world. The gift is for the world as well as us because if we have this gift, we can’t help sharing it with others. When we incarnate this gift, which accompanies and guides our journey into fullness of life as Christians, the gift not only changes us; it also changes the world in which we live.

In the first chapter of this letter, Paul, speaking as a pastor, says that he was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ “by the will of God.” Paul did not become a pastor out of his own desire or ambition. It was not a career choice; something he wanted to do. It was something he had to do! It was something he couldn’t not do! This is the mark of a true call.

In his letter, Paul addresses “the saints who are in Ephesus.” At the time Paul wrote this letter, the church had not begun the process of officially 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 chuffed at the idea that we are saints; lest we think too highly of ourselves and lose touch with the precious gift of humility (which I think is another of the gifts of the Holy Spirit), I think Paul means that you and I are “potential” saints—i.e., we are saints in process. Paul offers a note of clarification when he describes saints as those “who are faithful in Christ Jesus.” This raises an interesting question: what would it mean to be “faithful in Christ Jesus?”

Paul does not describe a saint as one who has lived a perfect life, as one who has done or is doing great deeds, as one who performs miracles like miraculous healings or walking on water. For those of you who have a tendency toward perfectionism, who try to live by this impossible and psychologically unhealthy standard, let me repeat this: 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 miraculous healings or walking on water.

A saint is “one who is faithful.” A saint is one who is “in” Christ Jesus. Paul’s use of the preposition “in” is deeply meaningful. The faithful are “in” Christ Jesus. Remember how, as recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus promised that when 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 where Jesus is. We can be “in” Christ Jesus today!

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

Forgive me, but this sounds a lot like the Buddhist teaching that we all have a divine Buddha-nature deep within us. I would push this a little further and suggest that all sentient beings are incarnations of this Buddha-nature. All we have to do is wake up, realize this, and live it out in our daily life. This is what it means to be enlightened! And this is how we incarnate the Kingdom of God here on earth!

Some people remind themselves of the grace of God by keeping what is called a “blessings journal.” They spend 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, our little aches and pains, the people whom we find annoying, or the things--like the weather, the traffic, the closing of the Christmas Tree Shops; recent rulings of the Supreme Court, and the standing of both the Red Sox and the Yankees in the American League East, little things that don’t go as we would like wouldn’t seem that overwhelming! It would put things in perspective.

In the first chapter, Paul 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 doesn’t mean that we are saved, that all our sin has been washed away. He means that things are restored to their proper position.

What is our true or proper position? It is to be children of God, to be incarnations 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, sexual orientations, or religions, when we look down on our brothers and sisters, we are not in our true state. When we are not in our true state, we find ourselves filled with anxiety, fear, anger, and a fruitless addiction to power and control. 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, just as the Prodigal Son was redeemed when he returned home and experienced his father's unconditional love, just as the woman caught in adultery was redeemed when Jesus, who saved her from being stoned to death, told her to go and sin no more. Some traditions suggest that this woman might have been Mary Magdalene. When we are redeemed, our lives are no longer centered in ourselves; they are centered in God. If faith is the quality of our relationship with God, then faith *must* give rise to good works! It can't not give rise to good works! Faith leads us into a caring, compassionate, and peace-filled life.

Finally, Paul gives thanks for the faithfulness of his parishioners. He expresses his thanks 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 tolerate, accept, and perhaps even love those who are difficult or annoying. It is much more difficult to accept and love people who are not like us. 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. The Christian life, this kind of Christian outreach is not an onerous task. It is a life that is grounded in a depth and breadth of love that finds expression in acts of caring and compassion. How can we live this kind of life? Here is what I think is 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 *Pensées*, 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; of those who do not meet our standards or 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 as Christ sees them. When we do this, we see “with the eyes of our heart enlightened.” This enables us to discover or rediscover Christ not only in “the least of these,” but also in those close to us!

Have you noticed that sometimes it is more difficult to see Christ in our stupid and annoying relatives or the person on the other end of the political spectrum than it is in the drunken, drug-addicted, homeless person at the intersection of Mass & Cass?

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 *bodhicitta*, which roughly translates as an enlightened mind. *Bodhicitta* is the experience of an open, kind, and compassionate heart.

*Bodhicitta* is the opposite of the replacement theory views that were espoused by the white supremacist who recently received 90 consecutive life terms for killing 23 Latino immigrants in a Walmart in El Paso; or the actions of the men addicted to power and violence who, over the Fourth of July weekend, randomly, killed 20 people and wounded 126 in Shreveport, Louisiana; in Philadelphia; in Baltimore; in Fort Worth; in Lansing, Michigan; in Wichita, Kansas; and in Tampa where a 7-year-old boy was fatally shot after two groups of people started arguing over the reckless driving of a Jet Ski.

To put things in perspective, in the country, in the continent of Australia, there were no shootings, no mass killings this past week. In fact, there has been only one mass shooting in Australia in the last 27 years. This is because their government, shocked by a

mass shooting which killed 35 people in a cafe in Tasmania in 1996, passed some very strict gun restrictions.

Could it be that our nation is off center?

Tibetan Buddhism teaches that *bodhicitta* 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 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 philosopher's stone, like the treasure hidden in the field, like the alchemists' gold, *bodhicitta* is always there! It is our deepest, truest nature. In Christian terms, it is our soul.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, when we experience *bodhicitta* within ourselves, we immediately realize that this spark of divinity is also within every other human being, 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 to the Ephesians 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, if we can see everything and everyone with our normal, everyday eyes, I daresay we won't see very much. It won't look like much of a world. If, however, we can see through the eyes of faith, 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!

*A sermon preached by the Reverend Paul D. Sanderson  
The First Community Church of Southborough  
[www.firstcommunitychurch.com](http://www.firstcommunitychurch.com)  
July 9, 2023*

An audio version of this sermon will be posted on our church website later this week.