

SEEING GOD

Psalm 26
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Faith Community
October 5, 2003

Introduction

When I was a senior in college one of my fraternity brothers was sitting in my room when all of a sudden he said, “Are you really going into the ministry?” I said I was going to seminary to see if it seemed like the right thing to do.

“That’s such a waste,” he said.

“What do you mean? Seminary is such a waste?”

“The whole thing. You’re a bright guy. You have a lot to offer; I hate to see you throw it all away.”

“What are you talking about?”

“All that stuff is make-believe. There isn’t anything to it, and you’re going to waste your life working with something that isn’t real.”

I tried to tell him politely that I thought he was completely wrong, but I don’t think I made any progress. How do we know it’s real? How do we know God exists?

I

If you have lived in the world at all, you have certainly seen evidence that God exists. No one has ever seen God, but in our world we can see the “fingerprints” of God; indications that God is here. For many people the order of our world is the greatest evidence for God. When John Glenn returned from orbiting the globe the first time, he wrote an article about why he believed in God.

He said our world has such intricate order to it – from the tiny atom to the vast, unexplored universe. From the tiniest being to the incalculable reaches of the universe, there is an order that points to a Creator. The result – the world – reflects the hand of the one who created it.

It’s hard to believe that the intricacy of our world is just a matter of coincidence. The order that runs clear through our universe shows that a creative being is at work.

Others see God in the beauty of the world. Who hasn’t stood looking at a gorgeous sunset and felt it impossible to not believe in God? I’m sure that most people who stand at the rim of the Grand Canyon feel some sense of the presence of God as Creator.

To look carefully at the intricate beauty of a flower is to be impressed by God’s creation. Look closely at the gentle white flow of a calla lily, or the regal beauty of a bird of paradise and

try to say this is all just a coincidence – an accident of nature. Beauty indicates a marvelous Creator-God.

Who hasn't stood out on a dark, starry night and been overwhelmed by the awesomeness of the universe?

II

The moral order also reflects the existence of God. In our world there is a sense of right and wrong. Virtually everybody has a sense of what is good and what is evil. I think, "Even those who live their lives doing evil realize that it is wrong."

There is a moral order to life that says that tyranny and abuse must not have the last word. Horrible tyrants like Adolf Hitler take power, but they also cause people to rise up against them and defeat them.

In a basic way so many of us feel that there is One who cares about injustice, who feels that abuse and inhumanity in the world must be stopped. Because we believe in God we have a foundation on which to base our moral sense. These evils aren't just wrong because they seem to be, they are wrong because they are offenses against God.

The fact that there is a moral sense of good and evil, right and wrong, in the world indicates the presence of God. It is the sign of a God who cares about justice and morality.

III

We also have people who tell us of their experiences with God. We may have a neighbor who tells of the support she felt through her whole battle with cancer. "I don't know how I would have made it thru the chemo treatments and everything I had to endure, if I didn't trust in God." All around us there are witnesses to the power of God in life. People tell of the strength they have received from their trust in God.

Historically people have written about how God turned their lives around. John Wesley writes of his trembling sense of God's presence and the change it made in his life. St. Augustine has written his "Confessions" about how God stopped his life and turned it completely in the opposite direction. He changed from a man living with a woman he wasn't married to and their son, to not only one of the greatest bishops of the church, but also one of its most profound thinkers.

In contemporary literature we can read novelist Anne LaMott as she tells of her transformation from a life of drugs, alcohol and sex to a strong commitment to God and Christ in her life. On the streets of San Francisco she felt God direct her to go into a Presbyterian church and ask to see the pastor. He listened to her, cared for her, and he and the congregation helped her change her life. From that time on she felt God pursuing her to let him in her life. Finally, she did.

From the prophets of the Old Testament to our contemporary world, people have written about the power of God and the effects God has had on their lives.

IV

But we learn most clearly about God from Jesus of Nazareth, God's son. In this person we see most distinctly what God is like. In him we find what God wants for our lives. As the author of Hebrews says, he is "the exact imprint of God's very being." This person is the closest we will ever see God in this life. To see Jesus is to know about God.

Jesus came subtly into the world. There was no fanfare, no fireworks; Jesus slipped into our world. He didn't receive the reception he deserved. But he didn't want a grand of reception.

Jesus surprised us all through his life. He was continually showing us that our understanding of this world is upside down. The people we think are the most important, aren't. The people we think are least important are often the most important. The things we value don't have lasting worth, the things treat as less important often have greater value. Jesus shows us that even though God is the most powerful being in the world, God doesn't throw his force around. He isn't arrogant. God doesn't misuse his power; sometimes God doesn't use his power at all.

And Jesus shows us that God is even willing to suffer for those he loves. That Jesus was willing to face death on our behalf shows that God is ready to sacrifice for the people he created.

Conclusion

The book of Hebrews says that to see Jesus is to see God. When we hear what Jesus had to say, we hear God's word to us. Jesus is the Son of God, but what he brings us is more than the son of a father. We say about a son, "Boy, he sure has the eyes of his father!" or, "He is the spittin' image of his dad." But sons also rebel against their fathers. Sometimes they go the opposite direction. In that sense Jesus is more than a son.

Jesus is the human reflection of God. He is God in human form; or as one theologian put it, he is the "human face of God." Jesus is the strongest message we have from God, because he is a direct message.

Jesus is the best example we have of what God is like. He is the exact imprint of God, sent for you and me.

Amen