

Sermon for April 18, 2021

Reading: John 20:19-23

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

+++

The Sophomore -- meaning a WISE/FOOL -- is a contradiction in terms. It is a clash of opposing ideas. It suggests that such a person can be both WISE and FOOLISH at the same time. And it is the perfect description of the student who has acquired enough knowledge to think that they know it all. Such a student is indeed a wise fool. As my grandfather would say, they have learned just enough to be dangerous.

That's the way so much of the world seems to be today, sophomoric. From the words Sophia (wisdom) and Moron (fool). Or to quote the medieval scholars... to be a moron is to be the very height of the lowest intellect.

It's one thing to be smart. It's quite another thing to know how to apply your knowledge. And that comes with experience. I am not a big fan of modern translations, but I very much like this modern paraphrase of St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. At Chapter 8 "Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that 'we all have knowledge' about this issue. But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church." Knowledge puffs up, while Love builds up.

When I was a sophomore in college, Sam Cook's song, "Wonderful World" had just become popular again because of some movie, and I hated that song with a passion.

*Don't know much about history, Don't know much biology
Don't know much about a science book, Don't know much about the French I took
But I do know that I love you, And I know that if you love me too,
What a wonderful world this would be.*

"Wait a minute," I thought. "I know stuff. You don't have to be proud that you are dumb." Yeah, yeah, yeah, he's in love. And it's better to be in love than to be smart... but why can't you be both?

I had to be a little bit older to understand it. I really like that song now. It dawned on me one day that he was not saying that he didn't know ANYTHING; He was saying that love made all the difference.... Just like St. Paul. He's practically quoting scripture.

Are you familiar with THE HERO'S JOURNEY? It's a metaphorical plot in thousands of books and movies and stories. It was popularized by an American Professor of literature, Joseph Campbell, in the early 60's although all I think that he really did was give a name to something that storytellers have always known. The adventure story can be summed up this way: The protagonist in the story receives a call to adventure, and so must leave home and encounter a strange world, learn all he needs to succeed and survive, often with the help of friends and mentors, and return home changed or transformed.

Or, as I have observed, all good stories must tell THE GOOD STORY in some way shape or form.

As our Gospel lesson says... just as my Father has sent ME, so I am sending YOU... In this we can see the Jesus Story and also our own story as well.

This is a good model, and we use models all the time, but I would caution you about their use. Sophomores tend to put their trust in such models, embracing them as gods. My apologies to Neils deGrasse Tyson, but to infer from such models that they can explain the world -- and therefore we don't need a God to explain the world to us -- is to make these models into gods. The sophomore looks to scientific models and says, THAT'S how the world works. The truly wise know that models are only *tools* and like all tools they can be used well or poorly, used or abused. I can drive a screw into a piece of wood using a hammer, but the result will be much more distorted than, let's say, if I used a screwdriver. The right tool for the right job. Seems obvious.

So if you are looking for "proof of God," SCIENCE, is not the tool you use. Science requires observation and testable hypotheses, and examination of data that can be collected and is repeatable. Since God cannot be observed, you can't use science to prove or disprove God's existence. Once you do that, then science is no longer your tool, it's your religion.

Science will not produce proof, but I do think that it is more than able to provide evidence. The question is, whether or not you consider the evidence acceptable.

I was sitting in my doctor's office the other day and, and she had all of these charts hanging on the door. They were detailed drawings of the ears, eyes, nose, throat, lungs... I got a good look at the ears. Remarkable how our ears work. The complexity of bones and highly specialized tissues. It's like a Rube Goldberg machine. If one part malfunctions, under-develops, gets knocked out of place, the whole system collapses. As I walked back to my chair, I noticed the opposite wall. A pretty picture of a pair of hands holding a tiny infant. "We are fearfully and wonderfully made" the caption read. "Wow," I thought. "She gets it." Now that bit of wisdom might not make her a better doctor. But hopefully it makes her a better *person*, in that as a

Christian I hope to see the evidence of the fruit of the spirit born out in her life and practice. Being a Christian isn't "just for you." It's a gift that needs to be shared.

Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them...

Imagine that in these days of COVID. He does that in part because his disciples are not at all certain that he isn't a ghost. He eats fish with them for the same reason. "See... I'm alive...." And SO, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Let me ask you... who is Jesus talking to? Just the Apostles... Just those 11 guys in that room? OR is he speaking to all of us? Or why not BOTH. In which case, he's *still* also talking to us. And what is he sending them... and US... to do? Forgive anyone's sins.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures...

You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; proclaim to all nations repentance for the forgiveness of sins...

This is our work as His people. What did the Epistle (1 John 3:1-7) for today say?

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Get rid of the sin in your life. I encourage you. It takes effort and persistence. You will have to battle habits and addictions; it is an ongoing work. Cross bearing work. I find in my one life that I set down my cross from time to time. Perhaps you do as well. Pick it up again. Faith makes us strong.

Look at all the places in the Hero's Journey where the hero can get derailed. Look at all the stories about heroes that abandon their training before they learn what they need to know, which is most often HOW and WHEN to apply what they have learned. What happens to the sophomore hero when difficulties come? And things don't work the way he was taught?

Let me tell you... In the Divine TRAGEDY, the hero concludes that their training was pointless, or wrong or a lie. That they were somehow deceived. Their knowledge let them down or didn't work. And so they abandon the quest and turn to a more practical answer. They become burned out, broken or bitter. Or worse... they become the villain. Joining the ranks of the dark side. Actively working against what they had been taught. In Stars Wars, this is the story of Darth Vader or Palpatine. It's even the story of Obi Wan Kenobi who had given up and gone into hiding before being called back into the battle by Princess Leah.

In the DIVINE COMEDY... The Hero goes out unprepared, but learns her lesson and returns to finish what she needed to know. In this case, Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz. She had the knowledge but not the ability to apply it...

Do you remember those annoying words that Glenda speaks to her in the movie? "You don't need to be helped any longer. You've always had the power to go back to Kansas."

WHAT? Why didn't you tell her?

"Because she wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself"

Pay attention: That's a crisis moment, a hard truth. That's why some of us find it problematic. But they get through.

"What have you learned, Dorothy?"

"Well, ...there is no place like home?"

"You didn't believe that when you got here... now you do!"

In the Divine Drama, the Hero is humbled and comes close to abandoning the quest, but when he returns to finish the training, he finds his mentor dead, or dying. An example might be Luke Skywalker. He will have to finish his training on his own. It's a lot more work and a lot more difficult, but it's like most of us.

Once confirmation is over... we are on our own. Either we return to the ordinary world, changed, and we grow, learning to apply our faith... or we return unchanged, and start the cycle again, or abandon the cycle or stall.

"You've always had the power to go back home."

Why didn't you tell me? You wouldn't have believed me....

A hard truth.

It sounds like Peter in our first lesson (Acts 3:11-21) for today...

But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses

That's harsh. But the Good News is EVEN FOR THEM. That's why it's the Gospel...

Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

We have a good story to tell, and it's all the better because it's **true**.

So I proclaim the gospel to the Sophomores. If you have learned enough science that you have concluded that God does not exist then I tell you to keep learning. Because clearly you haven't learned enough science.

As the old saying goes... I've learned enough to know that I don't know enough.

If your experiences in this world have led to you to conclude that there is not a god, then you need to do a lot more living. And when you have done that, come back and tell me that there is no God.

As the saying goes... we get too soon old, and too late smart.

And if your knowledge of God is such that you have concluded that all gods are the same and lead to the same end... then you have not learned to apply what you know about our God.

Some of us have to learn the hard way. And for those that do, I wonder if they don't learn the lessons best -- provided they survive the experience. And, sadly, not all do.

I had to tell a young man the hard truth, when he insisted that he didn't need God in his life.

"Well, I sure hope it will all work out fine. I'll be praying for you anyway," I said "...Just do me a favor."

"What's that?"

"Don't die."

You know, if we are all just here as accidents of nature, as some claim, there is no real purpose for us. But if we are here because some incredible, all-powerful being designed and made us?

Then there is a purpose for us. We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made. And if this God is anything like the story we tell about Him, then He is a God who is LOVE down to the core and He made us in his likeness... to be like Him.

We are not perfect. But that's not a deficiency in our God. That is the result of SIN in us. But this God of Love made atonement for us and redeemed us. And that alone is the Christian Story. There is no other God in all the story books like that. No other god who becomes ONE OF US. Our story is unique. And it is true.

If it's not true, St. Paul makes it clear, then it's a hideous lie and we are awful.

But since it IS TRUE, then we are children of God. And our witness is LOVE.

Sophomores... there is an adventure in front of you.

Amen.