

Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood – Dec 27, 2015

First Sunday after Christmas

Listen and Be Curious

Ps 148 & Luke 2:41-52 – Sermon Text = Luke 2:46-47

***After three days they found him in the temple,
sitting among the teachers,
listening to them and asking them questions.
And all who heard him were amazed
at his understanding and his answers.
(Luke 2:46-47)***

[Hymns = 141, 163, 142,135]



It's an intriguing painting.
It was done in 1506 by Albrecht Durer.
Like any great painting,
it has many levels of meaning
and several possibilities for interpretation.

What I found most intriguing is the expressions
on the faces of the learned elders among whom Jesus is sitting.
According to the story in Luke,
Jesus has been listening, being curious,
and making suggestions of his own.
His elders are not amused by the questions or comments.
The faces portray hostility, derision,
confusion, and contemplation.

There are looks of shock, of suspicion,
of almost demonic plotting to get rid of this young upstart.

If you think of the passage from the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus chose,
after all this listening, curiosity, and consideration,
for the text of his first recorded public sermon,
we might get a sense of the reason for these negative reactions.

A couple of chapters later in Luke,
we find Jesus in his home town synagogue
preaching on Isaiah 61:1-2:

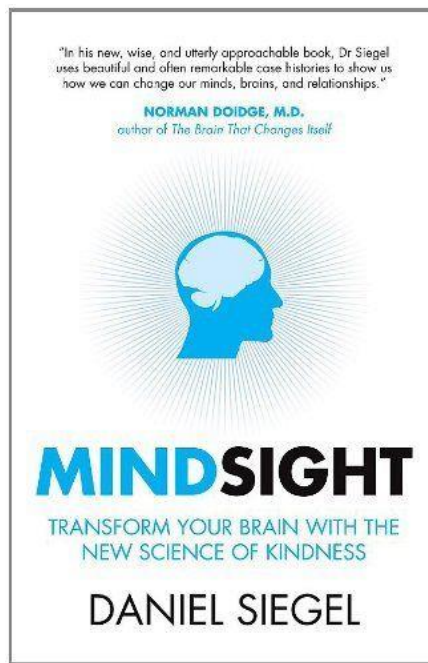
*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*
(Luke 4:18-19)

I imagine this may be the passage
the bearded elder in the front has open
and that they may be discussing.
This passage is a challenge to those who abuse power in any way
to deny the wellbeing for all that God desires.
The elder with the book open in the front
is the most thoughtful of the faces in the painting.
Perhaps he understands where Jesus'
line of questioning and commenting is leading.
His certainties have been challenged.
The prophetic spirit within Judaism is re-emerging.
God is working to fulfill those prophetic promises.
And that will change things -
in ways that will disrupt the control
that he and his colleagues have been enjoying
in both the realms of faith and politics.

There is a tradition within Judaism, at its best,
inherited by Christianity, at its best,
of humble curiosity about God's will for us.
We are invited to have faith –
to believe in and trust this loving energy
who created, sustains, and constantly enhances us
so that we can bless creation with the talents he gave us.

This God is deeply and intensely personal,
best experienced by us as a loving, accepting, forgiving, nurturing parent.
As in any intimate relationship, there is much we do not know yet.
We see, as Paul puts it, “through a glass darkly.”
And so, there is always room for growth
in our understanding of our relationship with this God of the Gospel,
this source and ground of our redeemed being in creation.
We grow to understand this relationship by listening and being curious.

Let me say a word here about how I think human beings work,
because it’s going to be important for understanding
how I think we can best follow Jesus in a fearful and divided world.
For me, these ideas come from Daniel J Siegel,
a neuroscientist and psychiatrist who teaches at UCLA.



First and foremost, he insists that our minds develop
in social settings, within communities.
So, Jesus among the Elders portrays learning at its best,
in conversation with serious students of the faith.
Second, he says that these communities of learning
activate three centres of neurons or information processing cells.
The major one is in the brain,
but there are also clusters of neurons around the heart and the intestines.
These neurons form the intellect, the emotions, and the instincts.

We are wonderfully designed by God
so that all three of these centres of awareness
work together to generate wisdom.
When the particular role of any of these centres is ignored,
our ability to understand is diminished.
When we pay attention to all three,
and imagine them working in alignment and in sync,
we have access to the full wisdom of God's love
that is within us and around us.

We best activate the capabilities of our wisdom
by listening and being curious.
For Christians, we are listening for and being curious about
what this generous and merciful God has done for us and wants for us.

That is best understood by exploring
the ways in which God in the flesh in Jesus Christ grew in understanding,
how God listened, was curious, and responded
as he blessed the world into which he came
over 2000 years ago.

That's what we will be doing this year through our weekly texts
As you memorize and ponder, engage in bible study,
participate in worship, and converse over lunch.

I trust our conversations will bless us and those we encounter
as we grow even further into our mission
of nourishing souls to flourish
in the grace of Jesus Christ.

But here's a warning.
Be ready to be changed, to be transformed, to be enhanced.
I suspect the miserable suspicion and resistance
on the faces of the elders around Jesus in Durer's painting
had to do with their realization that his questions and curiosity
was going to arouse the possibility of and desire for change.
Their certainties were being challenged by his curiosity.
He listened with respect, but did not accept without question.
He imagined other ways of interpreting the Scriptures
that witnessed for faithfully
to God's steadfast and eternal love,
a love that constantly seeks to enhance our flourishing.