

Lux et Veritas

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in St. John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2009.

But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.. John 3:21

There is something in us that asks where and how we see God. Our own images of God vary as widely as our imaginations.

There is a story about the Archbishop of Canterbury, the spiritual head of the Anglican Communion, arriving at an airport. As he approaches the driver of the car waiting for him, the Archbishop hesitates and explains that he never gets the chance to drive and asks if he could get behind the wheel. Reluctantly, the driver gives him the keys and gets in back while the Archbishop gets behind the wheel and drives off down the road at speeds of up to eighty miles an hour, ignoring pleas to slow down. Inevitably there are sirens and flashing lights at which point the Archbishop pulls over, stops and lowers the window. The officer looks at the archbishop and his passenger in the back and radios back to headquarters explaining his reluctance to issue a speeding ticket to a driver with such an important passenger. "Well, who is it?" "I'm not sure, but I think he must be God!" "What makes you think that?" "Well, for one thing he has the Archbishop of Canterbury as his driver!"

As children we all had our own ideas of what God must be like. The biblical creation stories tell us that we are made in the image of God. From that we might conclude that God must have a human face complete with two eyes and ears, a nose and a mouth. There are various examples of that human image of God in classical art, one in particular by the 16th century German artist Albrecht Durer portraying God as an old man with a long white beard wearing magnificent robes and a glorious crown.

The reality is that God is above human description and is not confined to any human characteristic, least of all being male or female. Even so, the limitations of our human mind and language compel us to speak of God in human terms. We speak of the mind of God, the eyes, the face, the mouth, the heart and the arms of God. Though we are limited to our human understanding, we need to think beyond our own human limitations. Better to speak of God in infinite and omniscient terms of light and truth and unconditional love. God became human to redeem humanity by revealing all that is loving and good and true and right and just.

Our image of God can be many things. Perhaps the best way to recognize the face of God is in other people. I see God in ordinary people who do extraordinary things. I see God in people who don't need to draw attention to them selves. I see God in those who do things for others, knowing the kindness can never be repaid. What we do for others may only be known to God and God is the only one who needs to know. St. Paul in his famous essay on love wrote that love seeks not its own. That is what makes the Christian life worth living.

This past week I was with a family whose twenty-eight year old son found that life wasn't worth living and ended it by committing suicide. I remembered him years before in confirmation class and how I hoped to convey God's love for him and that he was of infinite worth to God who gave him life. I didn't see much of him in later years as he and his family remained on the periphery of parish life. Now that he is gone, we are left with trying to understand how anyone

become can become so despondent and see no way out of his pain to have to put a gun to his head to end it all.

His family is left with the pain why he did it. They are left with endless questions of why his life was so unbearable that he couldn't go on. Were they not important enough to him to want to live, no matter how depressed or despondent he got? Was his pain so great that he gave up hope for believing that his life was worth living? I know that they will live with these unanswered questions for years to come. I know because my own father took his life when I was ten years old, leaving my mother and three brothers, the youngest of whom was only two and a half. I have lived with these same questions all these many years since. They have never gone away for me and they will never go away for them.

We begin life with a *tabula rasa*, a blank tablet on which we write our story. We all have been given certain tools and talents to create the life we want for ourselves. When we look at our lives thus far we may find that we aren't where we thought we would be and that life isn't what we envisioned. We have made mistakes. We haven't always done our best. There were times when we could have done things differently. We've hurt people intentionally or unintentionally and feel alienated. We've succumbed to temptations and have broken promises and have let people down.

We have a loving and merciful God who redeems us by encouraging us to be better people with value and worth. No sin, no dissolute life is ever beyond redemption. None of us needs to reach the point where our situation is hopeless. There is no life so messed up, no soul in torment that can't be redeemed through God's grace.

It is important not to compromise ourselves nor apologize for who we are or what we believe. We must not diminish our identity as Christians just to appeal to those who are different. To be totally authentic and transparent we must remain true to who and what we are. God never ceases working to make us into better people.

Make practical use of the rest of this Lenten season by taking a good look at who you are and how you can use your resources and talents to benefit others. Ask yourself how you can use those gifts to be an effective channel for God's grace and mercy. Discover what you can do to make a difference in your own life by making a difference in someone's life. Discover how you can project a vision of God for someone in whom there is no light who is in desperation. By so doing, you may be able to open that person's eyes to a life worth living.

Being made in the image of God is what is intended for us. We fulfill that image in how we live out our lives. Jesus as the light of the world brings us into that light to offer hope where it is needed.

Historically, the church has too often emphasized guilt. When used to manipulate and control people, guilt destroys the human spirit. My own view of guilt is that we may benefit from about ten percent of it if it motivates us to do what we otherwise would not do. The rest of it is destructive and wasteful. We read in St. John's gospel today that God did not send Jesus to condemn us, but to save us. That is our hope and salvation. When we have hit a wall and are ready to give up, we realize that God has placed us here for a purpose.

The Good News is that we have the hope of salvation in time of despair when we are ready to give up. When the Good News of God's love in Christ is rekindled, the light never goes out.