

All For One And One For All

I know that as you stand, listening to John's gospel, sometimes the hardest thing in the world is to actually hear what he's saying.

It's really easy to go off into mind drift, particularly, it seems with this gospel, because John constantly has Jesus talking in a very dense way, and today is no exception.

"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

Now that's not only a mouthful, it's a mindful!

And yet I think John writes this way perhaps because he is the last of the gospel writers and so he has some advantage over the earlier folks.

The gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke were written somewhere between maybe 65 and 85 AD, with John's gospel coming maybe between 95 and 105 AD.

Coming later in time can be a big help if you're after just the right words, just the right tone.

You know how after you've been in a discussion or even better, a debate with someone, or if you've given a talk, or having finished an argument, how, hours later, you start thinking, "Man, why didn't I say THAT!" whatever THAT may be.

Sometimes, our best lines, our best insights, come only later, after we've had time to reflect, to stew with it all.....

John's gospel, it seems, is that chance to say about Jesus what the earlier three gospels don't.....at least not so explicitly, at least not so bluntly, at least not so mysteriously.

"On that day, you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you."

He's not talking about a relationship that's going to happen **someday**, he's talking about us **waking up** to a relationship that **already exists!**

That in some strange and bizarre way, just as God the Holy Trinity is this perplexing union of persons who are the same yet different, just so, Jesus says to us today, you too have, **EVEN NOW**, been swept up into that very same Trinity, that very same

relationship, and you too have, as your true and real and authentic existence, entered into the unity and diversity that is God — if only we have the eyes to see it.

If only we have the eyes to see it...

I'm finishing a remarkable book written by a fellow named Jacques Lusseyran.

When he was just 7 years old he lost his eyesight completely in a freak accident, with one eye having to be surgically removed and the retina of the other eye completely destroyed.

You would think his world would be utterly black, utterly without light, and yet, that's not at all what happened.

Instead, he discovered that it is actually working eyeballs that often make us blind to the most important things in life, that often make us blind to the truest reality.

Because working eyeballs often give way not to a physical blindness, but to a blindness of the heart.

In a way, it seems, having eyeballs is in fact part of the problem.

With working eyeballs, we become masters of quickly sizing up things and people and events.

With working eyeballs, I can take, so I think, the measure of a man or woman in just a few moments; and it doesn't stop there.

Working eyeballs give us the ability to make judgments based almost entirely on the look of things, the appearance of things, the surface of things.

So it's no wonder that an itinerant preacher from Galilee finds himself nailed to a tree for having the temerity to speak on behalf of God; since we all know what God's spokesman looks like, or ought to look like, and it's certainly not this.

Maybe that's why it often takes a crisis, a breaking, a crushing, before we are ready to see more than the mere surface of things.

It was such a crisis that took away the physical sight from young Jacques, and still, within days of losing his sight, he reports, that "while I could not see the light of the world anymore, yet — the light was still there."

"Its source was not obliterated.

I felt it gushing forth every moment and brimming over; I felt how it wanted to spread out over the world.

I had only to receive it.

It was unavoidably there.

It was all there, and I found again its movements and shades, that is, its colors, which I had loved so passionately a few weeks before.

There was something entirely new, you understand, all the more so since it contradicted everything that those who have eyes believe.

The source of light is not in the outer world.

We believe that it is only because of a common delusion.

The light dwells where life also dwells, within ourselves." Lusseyran

It seems at first blush that young Jacques is only speaking metaphorically, but in fact, he is speaking quite literally.

As you hear his story, you learn that he is able to distinguish different kinds of trees by their shadows and their weight and the pressure they exert on his body.

He finds his way through gardens and meadows and barns all by paying attention to the feel of things around him - sometimes with fingers and hands, but just as often by the various colors different objects give to him - vibrant blues and greens and yellows - all plainly visible in a boy whose eyes work not a bit.

"Since becoming blind, I have paid more attention to a thousand things," he says.

One of his greatest discoveries is how the light he sees changes with his inner condition.

When he is sad or afraid the light decreases at once.

Sometimes it goes out all together, leaving him deeply and truly blind.

When he is joyful and attentive it returns as strong as ever.

He learns very quickly that the best way to see the inner light and remain in its presence is to love.” Taylor, Light Without Sight, Christian Century, 4/2/14, 23.

This, after all, is the same light that blinds St. Paul for those three days after he gets knocked on his backside by it.

Funny how it is only after he becomes blind that St. Paul is finally able to see for the first time.

Maybe this is what Paul's trying to get us to see this morning as he peers into the truth — as he coaxes the Athenians to see — that the true God is the one in which we live and move and have our being.

In a way, this “unknown God” honored by the people of Athens is our unknown God too; particularly as we move from images of God as an uptight old man to an image of God as all embracing, all consuming, all in all....

And the writer of John's gospel grasps this in a way that seems to elude the earlier gospel writers, or if not elude them, at least John, with the benefit of more time for reflection, more time for encounters with the Risen Lord, takes us ever deeper into the mystery that is our faith.

And in his unique way, John captures what Jesus is driving at in his never ending efforts to help the apostles, to help us, change focus from what appears to be real in the outside world, to change focus from the surface of things, from mere appearance, to look instead with the eyes of faith at the world as it really is: a world that is completely engulfed in God and God in the world and Jesus in God and us in God and God in us, all as one, forever and ever.

By losing his sight, that young French boy finds true insight.

By no longer fixating on the surface of things, he receives the great gift of seeing deeply.

Just as that young boy had to teach himself to see again without his physical eyes, so it is I think the thickness and density of John's Gospel says to us that the deeper mysteries of God are not evident with our physical sight, but can only be seen with the eyes of the heart.

Just as that young boy found that he had to pay attention to other ways of knowing; through air pressure and sound and that interior light, so John today invites us to sit, quietly, sometimes with eyes closed, and to ask for the insight that comes as a gracious gift from God.

This is the gift that Jesus invites us into today.

It is an invitation to see that the great separation that began when we decided to say what is good and what is evil back at Eden (and thus separating ourselves from God) is now healed — not by something we have done for God — but by everything that God has done for us.

By surrendering everything, by becoming a fetus in a woman's womb, by living and teaching and struggling and dying for us, by holding back nothing, God gives us everything, and in that gift of everything, the separation between heaven and earth, between God and humanity, it is healed, whether we see it or not, whether we believe it or not.

“On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

Perhaps today is that day.

+amen