

# *Sermon: Pentecost XI: Proper 16*

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August 24, 2014

Year A

Isaiah 51:1-6

Psalm 138

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

Some of you will remember... that I've talked before about how we are simply wired to reflect God's truth... God's wisdom... I've experienced this over the years... most consistently in movies... the problem is that the ways of Empire get in the way of this truth... other more worldly things clamor for our attention... so many of the voices around us... distract us from what really matters... but deep down... I think we know how to live a Kingdom life... how to reveal Kingdom truth... we just don't want to be the first ones to go there... with everyone looking... we don't want to go out on the limb... without knowing that others are standing below to catch us if we fall... we don't want to play that game... where two people are going to jump off a cliff into the lake... and one of them stops in their tracks... while the other goes sailing down into the water... we don't want to be that person.

In December 1979... in Gainesville, FL... I went to a movie on the first day of its release... there had been many movies that were made into TV shows, but this was the first time ever... that a TV show had been made into a movie... and I read that one of the women who auditioned for a part... wanted it SO badly... wanted to stand apart from all the others SO much... that she shaved her head before going... and she got the part.

The movie was the first Star Trek movie... and in this movie... the crew of the Enterprise had to intercept an alien craft... which was carving a path of destruction on its way toward Earth... and when they had been swallowed up by this enormous ship... this Deltan woman... Ilia... was transported away... and changed... modified... so that

the alien intelligence could speak through her... it said that it was searching for the Creator... wanted to know its Creator.

The intelligence was the Voyager spacecraft... launched in real life... by NASA in 1977... and during its journey... it had developed self-awareness... and it wondered about its existence... and in the end... Commander Decker... who had had a romantic connection with this woman... was allowed... in a mysterious crescendo of swirling colored light and music... to merge with the alien consciousness through her... and afterwards... when things had settled down... Dr. McCoy said... I think we've witnessed the birth of a new kind of life form.

So did you notice where Jesus is... when he asks the disciples who *the people* say he is... he's in Caesarea Philippi... the place where Rome had enshrined its ideas about the human standard... and in 29 AD... perhaps not long before Jesus' questions... a Roman coin with the image of Caesar Augustus had been issued to commemorate the birth of the city... an idolatrous practice according to the Jews... but in response to his question... the disciples say that the people think Jesus is some version of a prophet... theologian John Shea says that this is a social discernment... which emphasizes judgment and change, but doesn't explicitly take into account a new spiritual identity.

But when Jesus asks *the disciples* who they think he is... Peter answers for them... he's aware that the human possibility that's taking shape in Jesus... is to become God's representative on earth... living out the reality of God at every moment... this identity is not about a dead tradition... even if it is a grand prophetic tradition... it's about conscious participation in the divine life and the way it's expressed in human living... but even when Peter connects the dots... his insight is limited.

Our children's insight is limited... when we give them car keys... when we think they're not nearly old enough to drive... we see some of their other behavior... and it gives us pause... it's a good thing my parents didn't see some of mine... but we know... we

hope... that they'll get better with practice... and Peter didn't have quite the maturity we might have hoped for either... he may not have fully grasped the implications of what he was saying... in fact... just a few verses after today's... Jesus says... Get behind me Satan... and then even later... when Jesus is being interrogated... Peter denies him three times... but in today's reading... Peter at least gets it right about who Jesus is... and that's why Jesus calls him blessed... and gives him the keys to the Kingdom... there was a crack in the clay pot of Peter's awareness... that let more light come in.

What Peter realizes... is the ultimate truth about who Jesus is... but he doesn't realize this because he's flesh and blood... he realizes it because of his connection to... and openness to the Heavenly Father... that's what's allowed him to receive this special revelation... he gets it because his consciousness has penetrated through to the spiritual dimension... he gets it because the heavenly Father of Jesus... who also dwells within Peter... has enabled Peter to acknowledge the mission and heavenly identity of Jesus... I am in the Father... and the Father is in me... and I am in you... and you are in me.

And it's this heavenly consciousness... which becomes the rock that survives the storm... Shea writes: even if the gates of the netherworld were opened... and all of its fury unleashed... it could not prevail against a Church built on this kind of rock.

Peter may be the gatekeeper... but his role is not at the Pearly Gates... he's not the afterlife security officer who hears... and judges our pleas for entrance... The gates for which he has keys... are for a different set of gates... they're for the gates of human consciousness... which show us how we can be open to the influences of heaven... and incarnate them on earth... how we can bring Kingdom into Empire... into places like Caesarea Philippi... even when they're closer to home... and go by different names... What we can see when we look around us... in the political and social landscape... are people who feel certain that they know how things work... how things ought to be... who know who's right and who's wrong... who's deserving of privilege and who's not... all we

have to do is look at what's been going on in Ferguson, MO this week... to know that some of this is true there... and some of it is true elsewhere.

And this rejection of awareness... of accountability... is evident... even in new automobile technology... I think it's both funny and sad at the same time... over the past few months... I've seen commercials for new cars that have radar... so when the traffic ahead of you slows down really quickly... the car slows down too... or it brakes automatically when it detects something behind you... and then in the commercial... they show the driver with a kind of chagrined expression on their faces... like Oops... I almost ran over that child who chased his ball into the street... good thing this car is smarter than me... I mean... accidents happen... that's why they call them accidents... but where's personal responsibility... it seems this kind of technology almost becomes permission for a lack of human awareness... and creates even less accountability... I can imagine a Law and Order show where the defense argues... in a vehicular homicide case... that it's the car's fault... and not the driver's.

There are also people who don't think we know it all... don't think we know the best outcome for every situation... we operate... as best we can... according to spiritual principles... we realize that we're cracked pots... open to God's light shining in... open to a different outcome being best for us or for the situation... open to a confident faith in God's ability to redeem every situation... we do what we can... but are able to let go... or shift gears when it seems needed.

Most of you know that I went to Florida last Sunday to be with my parents... my mother was going to have back surgery... and my dad was going to take care of her... but on Friday... the 15th... he fell and broke his hip... so on Monday morning... my mother and I went to her surgical pre-op visit... only to discover that some mandatory medical clearances she needed were missing. My mom was somewhat beside herself... and in the 11th hour we tried to get in to see two doctors... and in what seemed like a miracle... by the end of the day on Tuesday... we had what was needed... We went to

the hospital on Wednesday morning... she was admitted... went up to pre-op... got an IV... the surgeon came in and answered our questions... and then the anesthesiologist came... and he said that my mom's sodium level was far too low to perform surgery... when it was this low... with general anesthesia... and that was the only way they could do this surgery... there was too great a risk for cardiac problems during the surgery... and he would not consent to doing it.

My mom was disappointed... but I'd been feeling... intuiting... that this back surgery was pretty extreme for an 84 year old... I still do.

So the determining factor... I believe... in who we say Jesus is... is whether we think we know it all... or whether we're open to whatever inconceivable series of invitations God might have in store for us... whether we think we know how things ought to unfold... or whether we're open to an outcome that's different than what we thought should have happened... whether we take personal responsibility for what we can... and leave the rest to God.

We pray: Thy will be done... on Earth as it is in Heaven... if what's in Heaven can be manifest on Earth... then there has to be some kind of spiritual wormhole... some kind of conduit that connects there and here... but the truth is... that there are here aren't geographical places... they're not latitudes and longitudes... you can't find them on Google Maps... there and here exist within us... and around us... there and here form the ground of being in which we live and move... and when we too see the truth of who Jesus is... when we're open to our presence in the Divine... and to the Divine's presence in us... when we're open to God working in our lives instead of us thinking that it's all up to us... then like Peter... we too are blessed... and we really do witness the birth... the baptism... of a new kind of life form... and like kids with new driver's licenses... we too will get better with practice.