

Trinity Episcopal Church

Lawrence, Kansas

Sermon for January 3, 2010

The Second Sunday After Christmas Day ~ Year C

The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

The holidays are over. With a few minor exceptions, the tinsel and glitter of Christmas and New Year's celebrations has been removed. Our newspapers and televisions carry advertisements of merchandise at New Year's prices if anyone has anything left to spend. Life seems to settle back into a routine that may or may not be altered from the routine of last year by resolutions. Mary and Joseph leave the spotlight of the Bethlehem star and the threats of King Herod as they settle down in Nazareth. The shepherds return to their flocks, the magi return to their country. After the excitement dies down, life once again becomes routine, mundane, and very much the same as before. It is quite likely that under such circumstances it may seem to us that God has gone back into hiding. Perhaps that is why January is such a depressing month for many. We might pause and ask the question, "What does God do after the holidays?"

God is still Emmanuel! The One who is the God of the great high moments of life is also the God of the ordinary and mundane. God is with us in every moment and in every place and in every activity. We see this in no more impressive way than in the life of Christ. Jesus, Emmanuel, moved to Nazareth shortly after his birth and there, in the carpenter's shop, and in the home of Mary and Joseph, he grew up. He grew up with routines and with what must have seemed an endless number of tedious responsibilities that he, as part of a family, had to bear. But therein is good news for us and for all people: by coming to live with us, the living God sanctified and glorified routine. Every life can have eternal significance and every routine can be charged with power from on high because, even after the holidays, God is with us!

"OK," you say, "but it's easy to feel God's presence near during the holidays. How do we recognize his presence on an ordinary day? How can we know God is really with us in the office, or the kitchen, or the car?" St. Paul deals with that question in his epistle to the Ephesians when he tells them that he prays that the Father of glory "may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the ***eyes of your hearts enlightened***, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe." St. Paul offers an insight that will help us recognize the signs of God's activity and receive God's power in the routines of our lives.

For instance, his prayer is based on the principle that what we are determines what we see. This truth is confirmed in all phases of life. A person with no knowledge of botany may walk out into the fields and see a clump of weeds and flowers growing together. They have no special meaning or message. But a botanist can see the same weeds and flowers, call each of them by name, and perhaps discover a rare specimen that has enormous significance and beauty to her.

Someone with no knowledge of the heavens can walk out at night and the stars are just so much light in the sky. But an astronomer can walk out in the night and call each one of them by name as though they were friends. The astronomer can see the patterns in which they are placed in the heavens. Or the captain of a ship can take those same stars and find the way safely to harbor.

An artist looks out upon the world and sees color far beyond what most people can discern. The great artist, Turner, was working one day and a passerby was watching the skill of his brush. This uninvited critic, looking over Turner's shoulder, said to him: "Mr. Turner, I cannot see in the heavens the beauty and color that you place on your canvas." The artist made this simple reply: "Don't you wish you could? But as for me, I can never hope to match with pigment the glory I see in the sky." What you are determines what you see. Perhaps this is true because it determines what we *look for*. You and I have been made children of God by adoption and grace. Children of God look for and find God's hand at work because that is what we are looking for.

For St. Paul, the main way of looking for the things of God is with the eyes of the heart. If routine is to become meaningful and even sanctified, then we are going to have to pray, as did St. Paul, for an enlightening of the eyes of the heart. Through the eyes of the heart we learn to understand what is happening in the hearts of others and we see beneath the surface of circumstances to a divine order more fascinating than anything telescope or microscope could ever reveal. It is an order that undergirds all the complexities and intricacies of life. It is the purposeful, creative, redemptive power constantly at work. Jesus called it the kingdom in your midst. Look around you. See the faces of other people, the beauty of the natural world? There is more that can be seen only with the eyes of the heart. When we learn to see with these eyes, things take on an eternal meaning, the activity of God becomes clear to us, and we are saved from monotony when the holidays are over.

Then, Paul's prayer lets us know that the eyes of the heart that is pure can see the face of God. Jesus was speaking about this in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." What is a *pure* heart? A pure heart refers to an inner cleanness, harmony, and quality of life. A life is made pure from the inside not by human effort but by the grace of God. When the human heart is open to God, transformation occurs. What we become makes it possible for us to recognize God in his nearness so that we can love God and have fellowship with God in all the textures of life. Whenever you see love, justice, mercy, integrity, faithfulness, and healing, if you look very carefully with the eyes of the heart, you will see God. Sometimes you are a passive observer. Or it can happen when you are involved in a godly activity.

So, if you want to see what is God doing after the holidays, you'll have to look through the eyes of your heart. God is still with us in every aspect of our life. God is constantly working with us to reveal the divine presence to us by the enlightenment and enlargement of the eyes of our hearts so that we may know even in the routine, monotonous and ordinary, "what is the hope to which he has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe." Can you think of any better way to make this a happy year? Whatever your resolutions for the new year may be, why not make the most important one that you will make better use of the eyes of your heart – those eyes you have been given as a child of God. I promise that what you see will bring you closer to the source of the purest form of joy. And you won't have to ask "what does God do after the holidays" again! Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed it so well in *Aurora Leigh*:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes of his shoes –
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.*