

"Saints? Or just Deluded?"

Revelation 21:1-6 & John 11:32-44

November 5, 2006

I want to begin this morning by thanking my neighbor and friend, Pastor Tom Lavery for share some good stuff with me through e-mail. A few days ago he sent a collection of 25 Metaphors and Analogies that have been collected by English teachers from high school essays from across the United States. They include some great images like the following:

1. Her face was a perfect oval, like a circle that had its two sides gently compressed by a Thigh Master.

18. Even in his last years, Granddad had a mind like a steel trap, only one that had been left out so long, it had rusted shut.

20. The plan was simple, like my brother-in-law Phil. But unlike Phil, this plan just might work.

25. He was deeply in love. When she spoke, he thought he heard bells, as if she were a garbage truck backing up

My favorites were: 2. His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances. Like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.

3. He spoke with the wisdom that can only come from experience, like a guy who went blind because he looked at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it and now goes around the country speaking at high schools about the dangers of looking at a solar eclipse without one of those boxes with a pinhole in it.

I find my thoughts tumbling as I consider the word for today - my thoughts cling to one thing and then another as though I forgot the cling free. Think with me for a few moments. We gather here today because we believe in God. We have faith. We celebrate the fact that in love for His creation, God provided a savior who lived and then died on a cross - but the incredible Gospel story tells us that He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Can your mind cling to that? Even more incredible - we celebrate the fact that through Christ there is a destiny for us beyond the grave and because of God's love we are forgiven and live as saints - forgiven and blessed in the mercy of God.

Why do you believe such things? How can you accept the fact that we believe that we are the saints of God? What kind of wisdom does it take to believe in God or the words of Scripture? Or have we been looking at the eclipse without benefit of the box with the pinhole in it?

These are incredible scripture - - - visions of a new heaven and a new earth / the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven from God. And then following that we have the story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. An incredible story - dead for 4 days - buried in a tomb with a stone covering the entrance and Jesus standing on the outside telling them to move the stone. Anyone of us would have joined Martha in protesting. But, in the story, Jesus is quick to respond to her protest. His response to Martha is a line that I found myself reflecting on this week. I would like to hold it before you today for your reflection.

Jesus told Martha, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? Do you believe? Have you seen the glory of God? Or are we blind? Can you accept the fact that God has forgiven your sins, claimed you as one of His children and views you as one of His saints?"

I was really interested to read an article that quoted a group of leading atheists who had expressed how puzzled they were by the continuing existence and vitality of religion. The article said: "As biologist Richard Dawkins puts it in his new book The God Delusion, faith is a form of irrationality, what he terms a "virus of the mind." Philosopher Daniel Dennett compares belief in God to belief in the Easter bunny. Sam Harris, author of The End of Faith and now Letter to a Christian Nation, professes amazement that hundreds of millions of people worldwide profess religious beliefs when there is no rational evidence for any of those beliefs. Biologist E.O. Wilson says there must be some evolutionary explanation for the universality and pervasiveness of religious belief."

It is an interesting question why do we continue to believe? Is it irrational to believe what we believe? Is it delusional to think that after 4 days in the grave Lazarus was raised - or that after 3 days Christ rose? Do we have virus of the mind - or did we look at an eclipse too long? The article I just quoted from goes on to say: "The Reverend Ron Carlson, a popular author and lecturer, sometimes presents his audience with two stories and asks them whether it matters which one is true. In the secular account, "You are the descendant of a tiny cell of primordial protoplasm washed up on an empty beach three and a half billion years ago. You are a mere grab-bag of atomic particles, a conglomeration of genetic substance. You exist on a tiny planet in a minute solar system in an empty corner of a meaningless universe. You came from nothing and are going nowhere." In the Christian view, by contrast, "You are the special creation of a good and all-powerful God. You are the climax of His creation. Not only is your kind unique, but you are unique among your kind. Your Creator loves you so much and so intensely desires your companionship and affection that He gave the life of His only son that you might spend eternity with him." {Quotes from "tothesource" - e-mail newsletter} There you have it. Two options as to what we might believe about our existence in

light of what it is we believe. What do you believe? We gather together as a congregation of believers who profess faith in a God who has created us in love. And not only has this God created, but He also cares so much about you as an individual that He has accomplished a 'Sainthood' for you in love and forgiveness. It is an incredible thing to believe. But what are the options? If you do not believe that - what will you believe? Can you truly believe that you are nothing more than a 'grab-bag of atomic particles'. Looking out at you , I am certainly not going to buy that! I suppose that there may be some other options as to what we might believe. But ultimately it does come down to the fact that there is either a God ... or not. And if there is a God - this God is either loving ... or not - concerned about us ... or not - either He has forgiven us ... or not.

Look at the Son sometime. You don't even need a shoe box with a pin hole in it when you look at the Son of God. In fact, I believe that you may become blind without looking at the Son. Is it irrational to believe in a new heaven and a new earth or to believe in the raising of Lazareth? What an incredible git it is to be able to proclaim to you that you are loved by God. You are far more than a conglomeration of genetic substance. You are forgiven - you are saints as God views you through the sacrifice of Christ.

AMEN