

## Metanoia

Not long ago a letter by Albert Einstein was sold at auction.

It says in part:

"The word 'God' is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honorable, but still primitive, legends which are nevertheless pretty childish."

Freud dismisses religion as "... a disavowal of reality, [creating] a state of blissful..... hallucinatory..... confusion."

And Karl Marx famously calls religion, "the opium of the masses."

So to those of us who gather here every week, the question is, "why?"

Why show up?

Why pray?

Why struggle to catch glimpses of a life that some of last century's best and brightest minds call nonsense?

Freud gets to the heart of the matter by asking: what is Really Real?

Is the capital "R" Real only that which our 5 senses can identify?

Or is there something far more Real than that which meets the eye?

Or ear?

Or touch?

The prophet greets us from the desert this morning.

He's making a way for the one to come.

Jesus.

The one who lives in a vastly larger reality.

The one who invites us into the Really Real.

If we are willing to be stripped of all we think we know.

Jesus doesn't define this Reality.

But he does tell us what it's like.

It's like tiny specks of yeast that, once mixed with dough, rises and expands and feeds plenty of people.

It's like salt.

Just a little changes the taste of everything.

Things tiny, things insignificant, become the gateway through which we might glimpse, if even for a moment, that which is Really Real.

Ever since the Enlightenment, we modern folks tend to define reality only by what our five senses can detect.

And yet ironically, even scientists are coming to understand that reality is far more mysterious than the observable universe.

Quantum physics discovers that a single particle can exist in two different places – at the same time!

The mere act of observing an object changes the thing being observed.

And, the most basic ingredients in the universe might be vibrating strings.

Meaning that all of creation is pregnant with music!

You can't see it, but you can sense it sometimes, can't you?

In the tingling that comes while gazing at an especially beautiful sunset?

In the delightful wonder of a small child seeing her first snowfall?

When meaningless suffering suddenly takes on profound depth?

When the grace of God slips in, if only for an instant, and embraces you?

The Gospel of Luke this morning is all about rescuing us from what seems to be real – so we might begin to develop the openness of heart needed to glimpse God's kingdom.

And what we discover is not childish illusion, but the very foundation of existence.

Today, Luke drags us into the desert.

He confronts us with a bearded, smelly, half-dressed locust eater who is talking about --- metanoia.

Metanoia is a Greek word that has come to mean "repentance."

Or sorrowful, breast-beating guilt trips over our many failures.

But that is not metanoia.

Metanoia means entering "the larger mind."

Into the "mind behind the mind."

Into the "mind in which all minds exist."

Metanoia means leaving the petty things behind.

Our worries and prejudices and fears.

It means coming face to face with the living God, who assures you that our worst failures are in fact priceless and necessary stepping stones to our salvation.

Metanoia takes us beyond the small mind that too often is preoccupied with self and tribe and nation, into the larger mind in which forgiveness reigns supreme.

"Forgiveness," meaning in the original Greek, "to let go."

Metanoia isn't a fairy tale.

There is no "once upon a time" or "a long time ago in a galaxy far far away," in today's gospel.

Metanoia happens in the very midst of everyday life.

Which is why Luke begins today's gospel with real people.

Living in real time.

In this real world.

By introducing John and Jesus in the same breath as Caesar and Pilate and the high priests, Luke invites us to see that "God's mercy comes in the form of human weakness.

Two vulnerable children, Jesus and John, will grow up to change the world.

While those symbols of human depravity and cruelty; the cross, and those who worship power, money and fame, these bastions of evil, become the very means by which God transforms the world!

So that people can develop the heart to feel and the ears to hear and the eyes to see that which is Really Real.

There is always something of the mustard seed about the Kingdom of God.

It creeps in.

Unnoticed.

Small and insignificant.

Until it grows and spreads!

Infesting whole fields and inviting all kinds of creatures to find safe harbor in its branches.

Which is why Luke begins his story by making the outrageous claim that God is at work in the weak and small.

Working through powerless babies and old barren women and unwed teenage mothers and wild eyed prophets and itinerant preachers.

It is these — the most unlikely of people — who change the world!"  
David Lose (paraphrase).

And that work continues today, here and now, in another group of completely unlikely people.

People like you and me.

And as that work continues, what sometimes quickly, but more often slowly, begins to happen is that we find ourselves moving away from the  
mindset of the crowd.

Moving away from the mindset of the prevailing culture.

And toward putting on the mind of Christ.

A mind that sees in all things the beating heart of the living presence of God.

And in that seeing, comes to understand that no matter the hills or valleys of life, no matter the crooked paths or raging streams, we are all in God.

And God is all in all!

This is that glimmer, that brief intuition, of what is Really Real.

We needn't go far to discover it.

We live in the very midst of it.

But before we can melt into it, we need to be transformed.

That transformation is, on the one hand, as easy as pie.

Because we don't make it happen!

God does it for us.

But on the other hand, it's a most terrifying journey, because it means letting go of control.

It leads us into a rigorous self-evaluation.

So that we might face who we are — before moving into the life of who we are destined to become.

Frightening, because God's way of living life is so different from my way.

What will **your** journey look like?

I have no idea.

When Meister Eckhart, the great mystic, lay dying at the end of his long life, several of his students kept asking him what they should read or how they should pray so that they too could experience the metanoia that Jesus offers.

The mystic replies that it's not about doing any of those things.

What matters is remembering this essential truth:

"That what seems trivial to us is important to God.

Therefore, treat everything in life the same, not comparing and wondering which is more important, or higher, or best.

We are simply to follow where God leads.

By doing what we feel most inclined to do.

By going where we feel pulled to go.

To those places where we feel most drawn."

If we do that, the mystic promises, "God gives us his greatest in our least, and never fails." Meister Eckhart, paraphrased.

Meaning, "your job is not to be Mother Theresa, nor is it mine to be St. Francis.

It's to do what is ours to do.

Which is what St. Francis himself says as he lay dying.



"I've done what was mine to do, now you must do what is yours to do." R. Rohr, Everything Belongs, 97.

May this Advent season be one of discovering what is ours to do.

And in doing it, may we penetrate the larger mind of God.

+amen.