

The Light Within

The gospel of John is not for speed readers.

John sort of grabs us by the neck for a moment and says, in no uncertain terms: "Wait."

"If you want to get the who and the what of Jesus, you gotta move slowly.

Like water percolating through rock, our journey into the mystery of Jesus purifies us, but it is a slow, sometimes painful, process.

John constantly has Jesus talking in ways that are dense and often confusing.

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

Why write that way?

Perhaps because John is the last of the gospel writers, which gives him an advantage over the earlier folks.

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

Being last can help because you've had more time to percolate through the rock.

More time to think deeply about the who and what of Jesus.

It's like being in a debate with someone, and then, hours later, you start thinking, "Man, why didn't I say THAT!" whatever THAT may be.

Sometimes, our best insights come only later, only after we've had time to stew on it.

John's gospel, the last to be written, explores the deep mysteries of Jesus.

"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 some future relationship.

He's talking about waking up to a relationship that's already here!

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!

Into that very same relationship!

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

And that's where the rubber meets the road.

Developing the eyes to see what's Really Real is the whole point of our journey of faith.

And who better to teach us how to develop those eyes — than a man who went totally blind at the age of 7, a fellow named Jacques Lusseyran.

One eye is surgically removed.

The retina of the other eye is totally destroyed.

You would think his world is utter blackness.

But no.

Instead, he discovers that he was truly blind when his eyes were fine.

Because working eyes so easily cause a blindness of the heart.

Working eyes let us quickly size up people, places and things.

Working eyes give us the ability to make judgments based almost entirely on how things seem to appear, on the mere surface of things.

Which is why an itinerant preacher from Galilee finds himself nailed to a tree for having the gall to speak on behalf of God.

After all, everyone knows what God's spokesman looks like, and it's certainly not this fellow Jesus!

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

That's what happened to Jacque when the crisis of physical blindness hit him.

"I can't see the light of the world anymore — and yet, the light is still there!"

"Its source isn't obliterated.

It gushes forth every moment, brimming over.

I feel how it wants to spread out all over the world.

I only need to receive it.

I find it in movements and shades.

I see colors, similar to, but far more glorious than the colors which I loved so passionately only a few weeks before.

Which contradicts everything that those who have eyes believe.

It turns out that the source of light is NOT in the outer world.

No, the light dwells where life dwells, within ourselves." Lusseyran, modified.

It seems at first blush, that Jacques is only speaking metaphorically.

But in fact he is being quite literal.

Amazingly, he can distinguish between different kinds of trees by their shadows, and weight, and the pressure they exert on his body.

He wanders through gardens and meadows and barns by paying attention to the feel of things around him.

Yes, sometimes with fingers and hands, but just as often by the marvelous colors that different objects share with him.

Colors of vibrant blues, greens and yellows.

All plainly visible to a boy whose eyes work, not a bit.

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

His greatest discovery is how the light he sees changes with his feelings.

If he's sad or afraid, the light fades at once.

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

But when he's joyful, 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, modified.

Isn't this the same light that blinds St. Paul for those three days after he gets knocked on his backside on the road to Damascus?

It's funny how only in blindness does Paul at long last come to see!

Perhaps this is what Paul's after this morning — as he coaxes the people of Athens to see that the true God is the one in whom we all of us "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 ideas of God as an uptight old man sitting on a cloud to the truth of God, who is all in all.

This is the gift John's gospel gives to us.

John captures what Jesus is driving at in his never ending effort to help the apostles, to help us, change focus from what appears to be real, and to look instead with the eyes of faith at the world as it really is.

A world that swims within God just as fish swim within the sea.

With Jesus in God and us in God and God in us.

All as one.

Forever and ever.

By losing his sight, young Jacque finds the true light.

No longer able to see the surface of things, he receives the great gift of seeing deeply.

Just as that young boy only learned to really see once he became blind, so perhaps the thickness and density of John's Gospel says to us that the deeper mysteries of God are not obvious at first glance.

The deeper mysteries 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 the inner light, so John today invites us all to sit.

Quietly.

Perhaps with our eyes closed.

And to ask for the insight that comes as a gracious gift from God.

This is the gift that Jesus offers us today.

It's an invitation to see that the great separation that began way back in Eden, when we decided to say what is good and who is evil, (thus separating ourselves from God) – that separation is now healed.

Not by something we've done for God – but by everything that God has done for us.

This God who surrenders everything.

Who becomes a fetus in a woman's womb.

Who teaches and struggles and dies for us.

Who holds back nothing, in order to give us everything.

In this gift of everything, the separation between heaven and earth,
between God and humanity, 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