

Year B - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost-2018

June 3, 2018

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2 Corinthians 4:5-12

### **Let Light Shine Out of Darkness**

In 1966 there was a meeting in Baltimore where French philosophers met American philosophers to discuss how they thought the world worked. One of the French philosophers, very famous, a rock star among philosophers, came, and his agenda was to show how all current philosophical thought was in error and needed to be scrapped. He was a very clever and energetic man and his presentation at this meeting succeeded in destroying the current understanding of how the world worked, leaving behind a heap of philosophical rubble.

While many admitted they no longer knew how the world worked, they didn't have anything to offer in its place. That being the case, the fashion became tearing things down and then leaving to tear down the next thing. As I read it, this meeting in Baltimore marked the beginning of the end of the enlightenment, that period in history where humans thought there was no God and if there was, we could get along fine without God. God was simply what we humans said but in a loud voice.

Our culture still thinks that way but already many of us know it is not working and can see the cracks in the foundation of our house built on sand. Why do I begin my sermon on Graduation Sunday with such a strange story? I don't want our graduate, or any of us, for that matter, to fall victim to such narcissistic, misguided, dangerous and hopeless ways of thinking even if the culture says it is true.

Now I say this kind of thinking is dangerous but I want to clarify. It's not dangerous in the sense that God is going to punish us for thinking God doesn't exist. The danger is that we cut ourselves loose from moorings we need to live life well and happily.

For example, the man who successfully pointed out how the world's philosophical ideas had reached a dead end made himself God. He saw himself as the destroyer who was not destroyed. His peers were in awe and feared him. Everyone wanted him to come to their

convocation and bless it with his caustic presence. He used his extreme intelligence to point out the flaws in the thinking of his time and he was right. There were flaws. Meanwhile he was not faithful to his wife and wanted to conquer as many women as he could.

I want now to contrast this famous philosopher of the very recent past with another thinker who built his life on an entirely different foundation. You can tell the two are coming from very different places almost immediately by listening to what they say. One will be very clear and direct while the other will be so obscure you will never be sure you understand what he is saying. And when you question him he will change his position and imply you are an idiot for not understanding him. He is all about himself and his own fame and cleverness.

So here is the test. Is the text I am reading from Jacques Derrida, the famous philosopher who pulled the curtains down on modernism or is it the Apostle Paul. "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." Could this have been written by a narcissist? Is this writer all about himself, his fame, his glory, his cleverness? Is his message simple or obscure? Does he intimidate you, like a great professor who wants you to be the spotlight lighting his presence on the stage? And finally do you think he is having an affair on the side? Pay attention to his life and not just what he says.

Darkness gathers. Who do you trust? This person says one thing and insists it is the truth. That person says another, equally insistent. One group says the other's view is political and deployed to maintain power. The other group denies any attempt to manipulate public opinion. Meanwhile the philosophers meet and debate whether or not there is such a thing as truth and if there is, how to determine what it is amid the competing, contradictory and confusing mass of conflicting data. That's our world right now.

Paul writes, "For it is the God who said 'Let light shine out of darkness' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Paul knows where light comes from and it is not "the enlightenment." It comes from God, and it comes in the midst of darkness.

When those philosophers met in 1966 they stirred the darkness but no light came of it. In fact what they thought had been truth and light collapsed. Someone asked the one who punctured the balloon where they should go from here. He replied, "I have no idea."

Paul knew and had known since his conversion that light comes from God. The light comes when it dawns on us we all are persecutors who have been forgiven. Remember Paul was blinded by the light as he moved toward Damascus. That's the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This knowledge is the treasure that the world cannot wrest from us. We hold this treasure but we ourselves are clay pots; nothing special, flawed and sometimes cracked. Don't look to us for truth; look to the truth we contain that comes from beyond us. As Paul says, "This extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us."

Do you see how different this is from the brilliant philosopher who knew how to tear down but not how to build up. In his narcissism he would not acknowledge anything greater than himself. In his desire to be glorified as though he were God he became a fool and lost his capacity to relate to his peers and family. On his speaking tours he spent his free time trying to conquer women other than his wife in order to show the world that he was a better man than all the rest. This was common knowledge at the time but seldom talked about since out of respect for his widow.

When we speak about the truth from beyond ourselves, the world who does not like to hear it, reacts to shoot us down. We can expect this and should not be surprised. Paul writes, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies."

When we were in Bolivia, on Lake Titicaca in a boat, Nat, our friend and guide, talked about why cooperative fish farming failed when they tried it there. A village on the lake's shore had voted to work together to give it a try. Those interested gathered their resources, bought the necessary nets and began to raise fish. They could raise more fish this way than they could

catch in the open waters and were making money. However those who had rejected this project from the beginning became jealous of their success and so cut the nets. With this pressure against them the fish farmers gave up.

What would have happened if along with learning how to successfully operate a fish farm they had also been taught to expect resistance and sabotage? What if they had been told humans are driven by rivalry and jealousy and often this leads to vandalism and violence? They should expect this and repair the nets as often as they were cut to show the opposition they would not be deterred.

And so to our graduate and all moving forward in life, I say expect resistance, particularly if you find your faith in God deepening. Hang in there and don't let the world change you back. Know that you are not alone; the Holy Spirit, who knows truth at a deeper level than any of us, is with you and so are we, members of Clarkes United Methodist Church, clay pots though we are. Thanks be to God. Amen.