

Seeing is believing

John 1:1-18

January 3, 2016

Seeing is believing. But what if you can't see?

Doubt, fear, depression, despair, anger, boredom overshadow our spirits. We are in the dark and we can't see. And because we can't see, we do not believe, and because we do not believe, we are not saved. We are saved by faith. We are saved by believing.

It's not that believing is a kind of magical incantation: say the right words to conjure the spell, win your salvation by professing your faith. No, believing itself is the salvation, believing God is who God is, knowing God.

Think about it. If you knew God, if you knew the God of power and grace, the God who was, who is, and who is to come, the God who is slow to become angry and full of constant love, the God who is faithful, the God who keeps promises, the God who spoke the worlds into existence and cares deeply about each particle, each atom, each and every human being created to be like him, created to love him and to be loved by him -- if you knew this God, if you believed this God to be, then what could you possibly fear? What would you doubt? What could possibly take away your joy, your joy in simply being? If God is, then we are the most fortunate, the most blessed of all creatures! We are saved!

We are saved. If God is. If we know God. But that's the big "if." If we know God. If we believe. If we can see. But the darkness of our spirits prevents us from seeing, prevents us from believing, prevents us from knowing God, prevents us from being saved. We need light!

"If" leaves room for doubt.

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.

Sure? How can we be sure? Certain? How can we be certain of anything we cannot see? And if to have faith is to be sure, if to have faith is to be certain, how can we have faith? We cannot see God. We cannot prove God's existence. So much is mystery. There is so much we can never know for sure. There is always room for doubt, honest doubt.

"If" leaves room for doubt and doubt leaves us living by what I call "practical atheism." We may live by practical atheism even while we say we believe in God, which means that our belief in God one way or the other has little impact on how we live. Practical atheism means living day by day without regard or need for God: acting on our own best judgment, living by principles inherited or learned by experience, finding our own way, trusting ourselves or the people we have come to depend on.

And practical atheism means that any sense of value we put on our own lives or the lives of those around us comes from practical measurements: usefulness, wealth, reputation, friendship. Success, popularity, praise are gains, while failure, rejection, exclusion are losses. There is no grace, no basis for putting absolute value on any life. And joy comes, when it comes.

I called it “honest” doubt, because as a simple intellectual exercise, doubt does make sense. Doubt merely acknowledges the honest limitations of our knowing. So much is mystery. Except that the doubt that darkens our spirits is not primarily intellectual, rather it is personal, relational, moral. It is not a matter of skepticism, but of unreadiness to trust.

To have faith is to be sure. Being sure is not the end result of an intellectual investigation, but a decision. Being sure is putting unconditional trust in God. Being sure is counting on God. Being sure is deciding that God is.

We cannot see God. We cannot begin to understand the height or breadth or depth of who God may be. We cannot prove to any one else or ourselves that God is there, but we can know God. And we can be sure that we know God.

How?

He has made him known.

The light shines in the darkness. The light shines in the darkness of our spirits. That light is the real light that comes into the world and shines on all people. That light is Jesus.

Jesus is the light. Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the message. He comes into the world. He lives as a human being among us. He shares our common lot, bringing to our common lot, bringing to our humanity, bringing to us, word and light, grace and truth. We see him, we hear him, we touch him, and seeing him, hearing him, touching him, we see God, we hear God, we touch God.

The light shines in the darkness. Now we can see! And seeing is believing. There it is! There is God. Doubt no more.

When you see Jesus, you see God. When you believe Jesus, you believe God. When you know Jesus, you know God. You can be sure, because you know Jesus. You can be sure that you do know God, and you can be sure God knows you!