

Scripture Reading:
John 1:29-42

Do You See, What I See?

A colleague shared this story. "Because we live over 750 miles apart, I had not seen my mother for several months. We were fortunate to attend a conference where I was working and she was a participant. We arranged to get together for dinner and decided the easiest thing to do would be to meet in the hotel lobby and go from there to a restaurant.

As I exited the elevator of the hotel and turned toward the lobby, I walked right past mom. Although she was looking for me, and I for her, we failed to recognize one another in the teeming crowd of conference-goers. Flesh of flesh and blood of blood, having spent the first 18 years of my life living under the same roof with this woman, and we walked right by each other! It wasn't until I bumped into someone else that I knew in the lobby who said they had just seen mom standing close to the elevators, that we finally saw each other. Even though we were looking, we had trouble seeing."

How often does that happen in our lives? Not just with people but with God and faith. If you have heard me speak before you know that I believe that God is present and active in our world all the time. I believe that if we open our eyes and hearts to it we will see and experience God, and yet I also know that sometimes in our lives we need someone else to turn the light on that will help us see.

Even scientists this week seems to be seeing the mysterious hand of God. Did you see this photo and article?❖

Washington: NASA's Nuclear Spectroscopic Telescope Array, or NuSTAR, has showcased the telescope's talent with an image showing the energized remains of a dead star, a structure nicknamed the "Hand of God" after its resemblance to a hand.

"NuSTAR's unique viewpoint, in seeing the highest-energy X-rays, is showing us well-studied objects and regions in a whole new light," Fiona Harrison, the mission's principal investigator at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California, said.

The new " Hand of God" image shows a nebula 17,000 light-years away, powered by a dead, spinning star ...

One of the big mysteries of this object, called a pulsar wind nebula, is whether the pulsar's particles are interacting with the material in a specific way to make it appear as a hand, or if the material is in fact shaped like a hand.

"We don't know if the hand shape is an optical illusion," Hongjun An of McGill University, Montreal, Canada, said.¹

¹ http://zeenews.india.com/news/space/nasa-telescope-clicks-hand-of-god_903026.html

I love it. Scientists seeing the hand of God in a mysterious light.

This whole season of “epiphany,” is a time when we grapple with the revelation of God with us.

The search for the recognizable Savior is central to today's text from John's gospel. Variations of the words “see” and “know” appear throughout these verses. John is searching for the promised one, and finds him as the Lamb of God, Jesus. It is the Spirit of God in the form of a dove that draws John's attention to Jesus and causes him to see Jesus for who he is. Like a friend in the lobby directing us to our mom, or Dr. King directing us towards justice, the dove points John to Jesus.

The first part of recognition then is seeing, becoming aware of the person and presence that is in front of us. The second part is the action, responding to what we see and who we know. For John, that response included telling others what he had seen, and sharing with them the significance of this event.

David Lose wrote “If you really want to understand why the church is declining in North America, you need to recognize how frightened most of our people are by the word “evangelism.” For some, it comes from being on the receiving end of someone else's evangelism. Whether asked “Have you accepted Jesus?” by a domineering brother-in-law or “Do you know where you're going when you die?” by a well-meaning but intense co-worker, too many folks have experienced evangelism as coercive, even threatening.

For others, the explanation isn't nearly as sinister. It may be a conviction that religion isn't something polite people talk about; or that one's faith is private; or simply the desire not to be perceived as one of those people (you know, the kind we just described).”²

Whatever the reason, most UCC people not only have little experience in evangelism but are downright frightened of it. And that, of course, cripples our ability to reach out with the good news. Interestingly, here in John's Gospel we get a second-hand account from the testimony of John the Baptist. But, he doesn't actually baptize Jesus in this gospel; instead he only shares what he sees.

“And that may be the larger point of this story from the Fourth Gospel -- that when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, our primary job is to see and share. Not threaten, not coerce, not intimidate, not woo or wheedle or plead, but simply to see and share.

John the Baptist does that here. He sees the dove descend upon Jesus and tells others what he sees. That's it. Andrew later does the same. He tells his brother what he and John's other disciples saw -- the person they believe is the Messiah -- and invites Peter to come along and see for himself.

Could it be that simple? At its heart, evangelism is noticing what God is doing in our lives, sharing that with others, and inviting them to come and see for themselves.” When I was a theology student I had one supervisor who would ask me every time she saw me “Where do you see God at work today?” At first this made me nervous, but then I realized she had turned the

² Lose, David workingpreacher.org

light on, suddenly the question no longer frightened me because I had started to take notice. I could see God even on those days when I didn't know how I would get to the end of it.

In fact revealing in this kind of way is exactly what Jesus does. "When Jesus notices some of John's disciples following him, he asks them what they are looking for. They, in turn, ask where he is staying. He doesn't give an answer. He doesn't question further. All he does in response is make an invitation: "Come and see."

Notice. Share. Invite. These are the three elements of evangelism, sharing the good news of what God has done and is still doing throughout the world.

The challenge, of course, is that most of us have little experience in any of these activities. And so I would propose we begin to remedy that.

Notice. Take note for yourself where you see God, and where you see the need for God.

Share. When you see God at work or present tell someone. "That star looks like 'the hand of God.'" Dr. King's message is what I feel God is calling me too. "I thank God every time I see you smile." Notice and then be witness to God alive and well.

And Thirdly, Invite. Most of us are really good about inviting friends out for a drink, or dinner, or a sporting event or...just not necessarily to church. Lose goes on "And, of course, we invite people to those things we really like, those things we've enjoyed and think others would, too. We need to ask ourselves first, what elements of our church life do we most value? That is, we're not just going because we have to but because we enjoy it. (If we can't identify any, then that's another problem altogether!) Then, our task is simply to think about who might also enjoy this event or activity and invite them. Framed this way, it's probably not as hard as it seems."

Now, I don't know about you but all those things feel like fairly small ways of revealing God's love to the world and yet notice what huge results they had in the Gospel, "reaching far beyond what the participants involved could ever have imagined. John the Baptist simply shares the wonder of what he saw, and Jesus gains his first disciples, people who will carry his message to the ends of the earth. Jesus invites them to come and see, and they leave their homes and families to embark upon God's great adventure. Andrew tells his brother he really ought to meet Jesus, and the rock upon whom Jesus will build his church falls into faith.

From the beginning of creation until now, God delights in taking little things -- things the world decides are nothing -- and doing something wonderful through them. So also with our initial attempts to share faith, our tentative ventures into telling others what we've seen and felt. They may feel like very small efforts, yet the God who brought light from darkness and raises the dead to life wants to -- and will! -- do marvelous things through them."³ Let's help turn on the light in our community and world by revealing the love, grace and hope of our mysterious God.

May God, who comes to us in the things of this world,
bless your eyes and be in your seeing.

³ Lose

May Christ, who looks upon you with deepest love, bless your eyes and widen your gaze.

May the Spirit, who perceives what is and what may yet be, bless your eyes and sharpen your vision.

That you may share God's light and love with all the world.

Amen.