

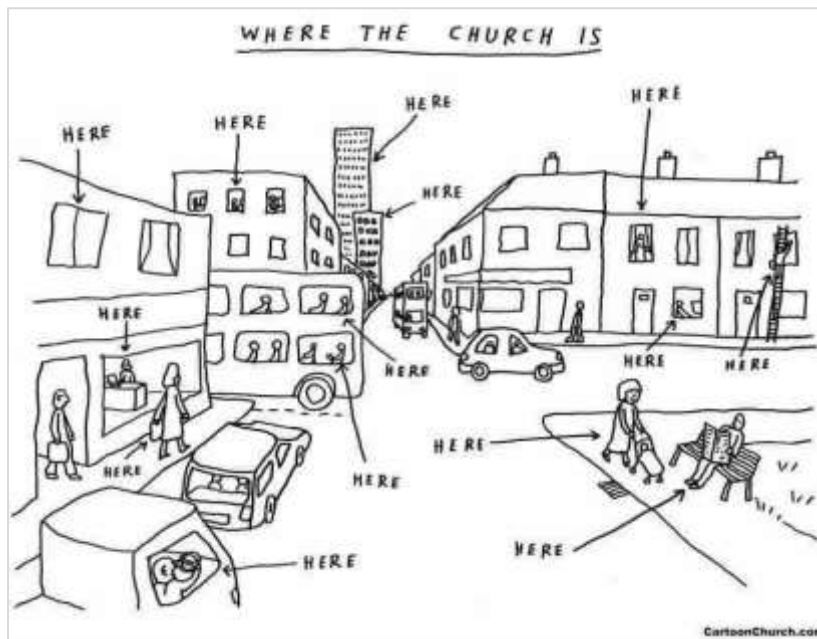
November 26, 2017
Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermons

from The Church of the Covenant

“Complete Sight”

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1 Samuel 2:1–10

2 Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. 2 "There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. 3 Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. 4 The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. 5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. 6 The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. 7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. 8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. 9 "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. 10 The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed."

John 14:1–7

(Inclusive Bible)

Don' let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith in me as well. In God's house there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you and then I will come back to take you with me. That where I am, there you may be as well.

You know the way that leads to where I am going. Thomas replayed " but we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?" Jesus told him, I myself am the way — I am truth, and I am life. No one comes to Abba God but through me. If you really knew me, you would know Abba God also. From this point on, you know Abba God and you have seen God."

Rabbi, Phillip said, "Show us Abba God, and that will be enough for us." Jesus replied, " have I been with you all this time, Phillip, and still you don't know me?" Whoever has seen me has seen Abba God. How can you say, 'show us your Abba?' Don't you believe that I am in Abba God and God is in me? The words I speak are not spoken of myself; It is Abba God, living in me, who is accomplishing the words of God. Believe me that I am in God and God is in me, or else believe because of the works I do. The truth of the matter is, anyone who has faith in me will do the works I do — and greater works besides. Why? Because I go to Abba God.

“Complete Sight”
1 Samuel 2:1–10; John 14:1–7

The Civil Rights Icon and Activist, Ruby Sales believes that each of us needs to have hindsight, insight, and foresight. She describes this as “complete sight, not “I” sight but “We” sight.” As Christ followers, how do each one of us develop this complete sight that allows us respond rather than react, to love courageously, and to be in solidarity with those who are marginalized in systems that value money and power over justice and compassion. Systems built on oppression and privilege instead of sharing and community.

The scripture we heard today, John Chapter 14, is often sighted by both conservative and progressives Christians to promote their ideological view of Jesus, these interpretations are I sight instead of We sight. The first comes out as an exclusivist view, that believing in Christ is the only way to salvation and wholeness with God. While other use the same text to argue that God is bigger than any one religion and offer a more pluralistic view of God’s Kingdom.

This morning I would like to offer that this scripture offers dualistic way of seeing. It offers both a way of life that is firmly rooted in the way, truth and life of Jesus and promotes a more complete sight of God that includes worldviews that different from our own. This alternative view is a way of forward that uses both the sacred stories in scripture and the lived stories of our lives to engage in the world and shape our understanding of God as we seek, as Jesus did, to be in right-relationship with one another and the natural world.

For the last three weeks in worship we have been looking back, back five-hundred years, when Martin Luther has the audacity to question the teachings of the church. He had the courage to tell his own story of how God, through Jesus, was at work in the world. Martin Luther knew that t God’s Kingdom was greater than what was being offered. Luther knew that the revelation found in the scripture was not just sealed in the canons, and creeds of the Catholic Church but evolving through each person’s life experience.

Martin Luther was rebelling against a church that was built on an economy of salvation which John Caputo calls the Little Church: it’s the brick and mortar, the prompt and circumstance, and the dogma and creeds. The key to the little church is that if you keep the Ten Commandments, practice the four cardinal virtues, add in the three theological virtues and if you want the platinum package top it all off with three councils of perfection; if you do all

twenty things your heavenly reward will be countless. The little church is in the business of religion.

But the Big Church, the Church that Jesus represents, is governed by love, driven by justice. The Church of the Beatitudes and Sermon on the mount. The big church offers gifts of grace, love and hope without expectations, without strings attached. The big church offers us a God that is not the final goal but is present from the beginning, as that from which all life begins, and presses in upon us in the present.

Marchae Grair walked into a bar eager to go to a storytelling event where people volunteer to tell their most personal stories to strangers. This wasn't just any storytelling event. This was a storytelling church service. Next to the doorway there was an invitation to write mini-stories that emcees would read during the program. The white slivers of paper read, "I still have scars from when..." prompting people to complete the sentence.

She submitted her mini-story, "I still have scars from when my dad disappeared for ten years," and took a seat. She watched two storytellers talk about the things that scared them and the things that scarred them. Then, the final storyteller took the stage. He just happened to be a pastor and friend who was preaching about the power of his own brokenness. His sermon was an offering for those in the room who felt as if the scars of life are still fresh enough to become reopened wounds. He encouraged them not to devalue themselves because of the brokenness that is still a part of our lives. He said our wounds and our scars don't make us too broken for anything—for love, for healing, or for closure.

Grair thought about the pain she still has from the father who was absent for most of her childhood and she realized that still wrestling with it didn't make her weak—it made her human. This storytelling church wasn't church done differently. It was just church. And finding the beauty within the broken was pure scripture. Minutes later, Grair sang "I Will Survive" at the top of her lungs, as she danced with 50 other people who suddenly knew that scars mark us but don't make us.

In this moment, where it seems that you cannot turn on the TV or radio without hearing about another accusation of sexual harassment or assault, mass killings, political chaos, and corruption. It may leave us thinking...where is

God? Jesus is saying to us this morning "Trust Me. Don't worry. I will be there. You will find me." Through the scripture, Jesus moves the theoretical to the practical: I am the way, I am the truth; I am the life. In his wisdom he reminds us of the imperfections of religious traditions: having the courage to flip over some tables, nail some ideas to the door. In his living he offers us a view of humanity; lived through love and justice he reminds us to expect to find God already present in the other.

In this morning's scripture Jesus is saying good bye to his disciples, reassuring them after they had eaten and he had washed their feet, after he had foretold his betrayal and predicted his own departure. That they will be together again in the year after, according to their shared understanding of God divine plan. This was a moment of deep confusion for the disciples and what Jesus is saying is "Trust Me." Through their anxiety about the future, Jesus is providing his followers with words of courage that even though their vision at this movement is clouded, God is with them, God is there. Jesus is telling them not worry. "I will be there. I will be there, very close to God, Don't worry. You will find me." In this passage, we may be coming to the end of the story of Jesus but we are just beginning the story of his disciples and how they wrestled with living a life in the way of Jesus.

After reading the book "A Year of Living Biblically," by A.J. Jacobs, former pastor Ed Dobson decided to devote a year trying to live as Jesus did, based on what is written about him in the Bible and other historical documents. Dobson, the vice president of spiritual formation at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, did not shave, ate kosher, observed the Sabbath. Each week he would read through the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to get a complete sight of Jesus' biblical life.

He even had a couple of beers along the way. Dobson recounted how he would often go down to the bar, sit up at the counter, drink a beer and talk about God. For Dobson, the most difficult part of the challenge was obeying Jesus' teachings, particularly the idea of blessing the people who persecute you. Dobson and his wife went for the visitation, of a friend of their son who had sacrificed his life while serving in Iraq. Dobson, overwhelmed with grief, because angry at the people who had made the roadside bomb, planted it and detonated it. In that moment he realized in the midst of those emotions that if he was truly living the Jesus story, he had to pray for them and bless them,

which is very, very hard to do. During this time of biblical living, Dobson even voted in the presidential race as he thought Jesus would. Since he had read through the gospels at that point over 30 times, he wanted to know who best represented the fundamental teachings of Jesus, and he felt that Barack Obama more than any other candidate represented the teachings of Jesus, so he voted for him. Dobson acknowledges that reading the Bible can be demanding. He encourages people, whether or not you ever read the Bible before, begin reading the Bible, and just listen to what God has to say.

Jesus encounters us where we are. Jesus encounters us on our very best and very worst days. And more often than not it is in these times that we discover that faith in God, allows us to move towards a new wholeness and a new image of God in our lives. It is in these times of pain and sorrow that we can witness to the world both the full humanity and the full divinity of Jesus, living in and with us. It is a recognition that in the creation, we were molded in the image of God and that there are many voices, many genders many races, many stories that make up the face of God, and that God is active in and through each one of us.

Five hundred years after the beginning of the Reformation, here we are in Cleveland, Ohio seeking how Jesus reveals to us a way of being in the world that promotes compassion and justice in our relationships with one another and with the natural world. We are here to witness to a way of life, through our living, how God continues to be active in the world and present within our own individual journeys. "In God's house there are many dwelling places" If we are going to take seriously following Jesus, then we have to engage with the world and not stay locked in our small communities, we must keep a mindset of "we sight."

This morning Kim is our Lay worship leader and Silas sang Simple Gifts, a song that reminds us that each of us bring gifts to this community and together we share those gifts in a spirit of Grace and Love. Silas is an engineering major at Case Western Reserve University from Nigeria, Africa. He has been active with the Case Concert Choir and wanted to learn more about how he could improve his singing and musicianship. With the encouragement of Dr. Garrett and Michael Peters, he began to sing with the Covenant Choir and take vocal lessons. After singing with the choir for over a year, Silas has

become part of our community, part of the shared story of Church of the Covenant. Silas represents a story of what music can mean to an individual.

Kim is a computer science major, from Santa Barbra, California. Kim is active as a leader in our student community. After discovering computer science here at CWRU just two years ago she will be a front end web development intern at Linked In, in Sunnyvale, California this summer. Kim was instrumental in the success of our Community Thanksgiving dinner last week, she is a regular at our Thursday Night dinners, bringing friends most weeks. Kim represents how we create new opportunities to engage with our mind body and soul.

Both of these stories represent the way our church, our faith community, engages with the world and makes connections with students along their journey of growth and discovery. It's about what happens here on Sunday mornings and the programs that happen throughout the week that meet students where they are, like our Thursday Night Dinner, our Queer Spirit Community for LGBTQIA Students, our weekly yoga class and our weekly student food pantry. It represents how the church speaks to people from non-Western-European heritage, and how the church recognizes the intersectional identities that we bring to our physical and spiritual spaces on a regular basis.

God's house has many rooms, each person can find a place in God's Kingdom by following in the way of Jesus, the truth and the life. It is how we can reveal the face of God to the world and how the face of God can be revealed to us in this time and place. It's not because we do church differently, it's because we are the church, right here, right now.

Amen.