

15 June, 2008
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The three readings that we have today, it seems to me, all point to one thing: Each of these three readings points to a different way in which God can, in fact, transform our consciousness. Transform our interior landscape. Help us come to a state of wisdom that is beyond our ordinary, rather pedestrian consciousness.

Let's look at the story in Genesis. We've got a couple. Now, Abraham is reputedly 100 years old (or so). Sara, his wife, is somewhere near that age. And God appears to them and tells them that she is going to bear him a son. Now, it's interesting that what she laughed at was that she was going to be able to enjoy sex again, not that she was going to have a child – but that's neither here nor there (or maybe it was for Sara).

What it required of them was for them to change their way of viewing reality. Now whether they were approaching 100 years old or they were 80 or 60 or they ever existed at all, they were going to be required to change their way of seeing what is possible in the world. And what that does is, it expands us.

We have very constricted views of what is possible, what is normal. So that when something is demonstrated that is beyond the restrictions that we place on reality, we get really excited about it. We call it extra-sensory perception, or we call it prophecy, or we call it any number of things.

But on the other side of that experience our sense of the possible, our sense of reality, is expanded. That allows us to be more fully encompassing in our view of what goes on, of who we are. Of who we are in relationship to one another. And who we are in relationship to God. And that's been expedited by us being able to see the world with broader and deeper vision and that's the experience that Abraham and Sara have had because now suddenly, after **all** these years, they're going to have a son.

In the reading from Paul's epistle to the Romans, Paul seems to be somewhat dazzled by this whole thing that has taken over his life. This relationship with God through Christ. He'd always had this relationship with God – previously it was through the law. But now he's been transformed and what he has come to realize, he focuses on in the last sentences there, 'God proves his loves for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.' That we didn't have to reach some state of perfection before God was willing to engage us in this new and profound way that's based in forgiveness, but that it was because we were such a mess that God wanted to step into that different kind of relationship.

Paul also talks here about how by this transformation we come to see things like suffering in a completely different light than before. Before grace, before understanding, truly incorporating this notion of forgiveness, suffering was suffering. Suffering just hurt. It was pointless and meaningless. It was just suffering. But now that he has had this

transformation, suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us.

So we have stepped into this new way of being. By taking refuge, in a sense, in God. Having this opening where Christ has produced this window has become, in a sense, this window in which we are able to open more fully into God's forgiveness and grace, we are transformed into a new state of wisdom in which we see the inevitable sufferings of life as being something that is transformed before us. It grows us more and more into being what God intends us to be. It doesn't just hurt, its part of the growth process. It's fertilizer.

Then lastly in this story from Matthew where Jesus looks out at the crowd – and I daresay that probably includes his followers as well as the rest of the folks – and he sees them as lost sheep. Sees them as sheep without a shepherd. Rudderless, directionless, suffering.

And what does he do? He empowers these twelve to go out and he gives them authority to cure the sick, raise the dead, clean the lepers and cast out demons. Now, I don't know how that was accomplished. If they went to a workshop and at the end of the workshop they got their certificate... or what it was that qualified them, but he gives them the authority to deal with these matters.

And what does that do? Well, this last week my family and I have been experiencing being on the receiving end of ministry. And I can tell you that that is a good thing. It feels good. It is a bonding exercise. It opens the heart to those who are ministering to us in new and different ways. And having spent years on the other end of that equation, and I think of all the times when I come away from a situation wondering to myself: 'I hope they got something out of that because I sure did'. Both the giver and receiver of ministry receive spiritual benefit.

Not only that, but we come to realize that we need each other. That the equation has to have both parties on either side of the equal sign for this thing to work. If there are not receivers, there are no givers. Just as much as if there are no givers, there are no receivers. We need one another, and what happens is when we reflect on this we come to know that this is part of the bond. This time I am a receiver, but the time before I was a giver and for that we must have each other.

How many times have I dealt with people in their later years who have spent a lifetime as a giver - and when it comes their turn? They don't have a clue of how to receive. It completely binds up the whole system. Everyone is frustrated, because there's all this willingness to give, but no receiver. We need each other. And we come to find out in that process that not only do we need each other, we *are* each other.

We are so bound to one another in that equation that we are all part of a whole. And that is a stretch - when we come to really realize the way in which we are bound one to another, it comes all the way back to stretching that whole notion of reality. Because in

our Western way of thinking, we think we are each little individual things and occasionally we bump into each other and maybe we hurt each other or help each other, but we're individual little bags. When we really experience this and open [ourselves] to this, we realize that somehow we are all one. We are *all* one. But it requires us to expand not only our thinking but our consciousness.

It requires us to gain wisdom and see how not only are we humans connected one to another, but every thing in Creation is connected one to another and that where we put our energy, that will grow. If we put it into the positive, those are the fruits. If we focus our energy on the negatives, that will bear its own fruit, too. Bitter, bitter fruit.

These three stories show us how God grows us into being Christ's, into the kingdom by expanding our sense of reality so that it can include something as outrageous as the reign of God. It draws us into that sense of being forgiven and that with a transformed consciousness we can find even the most painful things as grist for the mill, as fertilizer for this growth toward the kingdom. And lastly, through our ministry with one another, we help one another in this process of transformation into a *wisdom way of knowing* that lets us see the possibilities of the kingdom of God.

Amen.