

Epiphany 2012

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God Within

God, where can I find you? I seek you far and wide, I go to the ends of the earth in search of your presence. I look up, I look down, I spin myself dizzy in hopes of catching a glimpse of you. And then, in a moment of exasperated exhaustion I collapse, only to find that all along you have been closer than the very breath I breathe.

Our scripture reading today spoke about light, saying, "Arise your light has come!" Light is a word used frequently in interfaith settings to describe what in the Christian faith we often call God. Something I find interesting about our language is that when we use the word light it seems natural to talk about the light within us. We did this when we read the story of Wenda the Wacky Wiggler and wrote about our light on the blue slips of paper. Three Sunday's ago Blair spoke about how this place (Lynn Valley United) is a place where space is being created for the light within us to emerge-- and it all seems quite natural to talk about the light within us.

But what does it mean to talk about God within us? What does it mean to consider the idea that the very thing we so often seek outside ourselves, actually resides here... closer than the very breath we breathe?

This has taken me some time and careful guidance from spiritual teachers to begin exploring the reality of God living as part of me. Gently releasing the belief that God is exclusively outside of me, and therefore separate, distant, and almost elusive.

There is something really curious about why we often come to see God as being separate from us. There are many factors that contribute to this, including the historical use of religion as a social and political tool. However, another reason that stands out for me today is the power contained in the belief that God is, in fact, within us- it's almost too much to comprehend. What do we do with this belief? This idea reminds me of the words of Marianne Williamson. Perhaps you have heard these words before, and perhaps this is the first time. Either way, I encourage you to hear them with fresh ears.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us....We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same."

When I hear these words, I think about the beauty of the glory of God within us igniting the glory of God in others. This is one of the reasons it is so important to engage with the knowing

that God lives within us. If we believe God is only outside of us, this is the only place we will look for God. This limits our capacity to understand and embody the fullness of our divine nature. In fact, as soon as we call God by name, we are putting limits on our understanding. And as God is outside any limits our human minds create, any opportunity we have to twist and soften the parameters with which we understand God, we allow space for the fullness of the Divine to manifest (to unfold) in our conscious minds. Stated in another way, only the doors we knock have the opportunity of opening to us.

Jesus tells us, "The kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!'; because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17: 20-21). Take a moment to sink into the deep knowing that the Kingdom of God is within you. Try this on. Breathe into it. Close your eyes and allow it to settle in your being. "The kingdom of God is within you". If you really knew this to be true- what in your thinking, your feelings or your actions would change? How would you see the world differently? Where would you seek God?

If we believe God also lives inside us, then this becomes a place we look for God. When we begin to make spiritual contact with ourselves, we begin to form a spiritual relationship with ourselves. We can sum it all up by saying: The more deeply we know ourselves, the more deeply we are able to know God; thus, opening ourselves to the possibility of spiritual transformation.

Now, depending on where you are coming from, this may sound exciting, it may sound confusing, it may sound absurd, it may stretch your understanding, and it may be something that fits right in with your current knowing. Regardless of where you find yourself in this moment, the most remarkable thing in all of this is that God is already there, living within you. You can rest assured knowing you can choose to do nothing, never come to church again, never again help a neighbour, never pray, never ask forgiveness of sins and God still lives in you. This is what it means to *be*.

So, if God already lives in us, why engage in spiritual practice? Why come to church, meditate, volunteer, pray? We do all these things simply to become more deeply aware of God, thus creating the opportunity for deeper relationship. Through deeper relationship we allow ourselves to be guided by the wisdom of the divine. We rest peacefully knowing we are not alone. We are not making random decisions with the limited perspective afforded to us by the nature of being individuals. We tap into a greater purpose, a deeper knowing; we access divine will, leading to higher levels of consciousness, a more peaceful planet, more love, grace and compassion.

When we access the lens of the divine, we understand that there is no, "me" and no "you" we are all interconnected; the highest good of one is the highest good of all and the highest good of all is the highest good of one.

This is God; living in you in this, and every, moment. Just as our scripture reads, “arise, shine, for your light has come!” This invitation, this call, this purpose speaks directly to us today. It begs us to be the fullness of our true selves. It begs us to release the barriers that prevent the divinity within us from shining. In doing this, we become beacons that draw others near and ignite the divinity burning within them. Just as the scripture reads, “the nations will come to your light and the leaders to your bright dawn!” This is also true also for this place.

In addition to light, our scripture also speaks of the realities of the darkness that covers the earth and the dense clouds that enshroud the peoples. I think of all the examples of darkness present in our world today- war between our nations and our families, hunger, addiction, poverty, loneliness, hatred, bullying the list goes on.

It can feel overwhelming to think about the darkness faced by our brothers and sisters in countries where basic human rights and dignities are far from being met. It can also feel overwhelming to think about the pain and desperation experienced by members of our own communities. Where God, do we begin? To which charity do I give my money? Who needs it most? Who is most deserving? Who is most desperate? Which organization will honor my gifts, ensuring they are received by those they are intended for? And ultimately the question arises....Why God, is our world this way?

When the question of how to be of service comes to mind, I think of Mother Theresa. One day she was asked how she could continue day after day after day, visiting the terminally ill: feeding them, touching them, wiping their brows, giving them comfort as they lay dying. She said, "It's not hard, because in each one I see the face of Christ in one of his most distressing disguises". If we wish to see the face of Christ in others, as Mother Theresa did, we must also see the face of Christ when we look in the mirror.

I invite you to make contact with both the light and the darkness that lives within you. Step into a moment where you believe it is truly possible to transform our world beginning with the transformation of ourselves. I invite you to soften resistance to this idea. Soften the nay-saying voice telling you, “... this isn't how the *real* world works”. Saying, “I am too old to transform”, saying “I don't even know what transformation is”, saying, “She can't mean *me*... if she really knew me....she would know she doesn't mean me”. If you are able to soften the no's, the cant's, the impossibles, and for a moment entertain the notion that you hold a piece of the puzzle that will transform humanity, I ask you, what's *your* piece? How clear is your connection that allows you to hear the voice of God, guiding your path? What spiritual practices support you to hear and live out your call? Perhaps it's prayer, perhaps reading, meditation, study of scripture, song- whatever it is for you, I encourage you to make time.

I know sometimes it feels like this can wait, the pressure is not as immediate as the dirty laundry, the returning of emails, the picking up of children, but I offer this to you: our world is a reflection that we have waited far too long. It is time now for us to become serious about

transforming the world from the inside out. Our scripture reads, “the glory of Yhwh is upon you!... Lift up your eyes, and look around: they’re all gathering and coming to you.” This is what is possible.