

Year A, February 26, 2017  
Last Sunday After Epiphany  
Christ Church, Mexia

"A kindergarten teacher told (her students) to draw a picture of what was important to them. In the back of the room Johnny began to labor over his drawing. Everybody else finished and handed in their picture but he didn't. He was still drawing. The teacher graciously walked back and put her arm around Jonny's shoulder and said, 'Johnny, what are you drawing?' He didn't look up; he just kept on working feverishly at his picture. He said, 'God.' 'But Johnny,' she said gently, 'no one knows what God looks like.' He answered, "They will when I'm through." (Swindoll)

The Almighty God is often depicted in the Bible as a bright light, a cloud of fire and smoke, a burning bush, a voice from heaven - things of this nature. If God is something our minds cannot truly comprehend, then it seems reasonable that to come face to face with God would be a frightening experience for most, if not all, of us.

Let me use the following story by Paul Harvey to illustrate one of the points that I want to make this morning:

"One raw winter night a man heard an irregular thumping sound against the kitchen door. He went to the window and watched as tiny, shivering sparrows, attracted to the evident warmth inside, beat in vain against the glass.

Touched, the farmer bundled up and trudged through fresh snow to open the barn for the struggling birds. He turned on the lights, tossed some hay in a corner, and sprinkled a trail of saltine crackers to direct them to the barn. But the sparrows, which had scattered in all directions when he emerged from the house, still hid in the darkness afraid of him.

He tried various tactics: circling behind the birds to drive them toward the barn, tossing cracker crumbs in the air toward them, retreating to his house to see if they'd flutter into the barn on their own. Nothing worked. He, a huge, alien creature, had terrified them; the birds could not understand that he actually desired to help.

He withdrew to his house and watched the doomed sparrows through a window. As he stared, a thought hit him like lightning from a clear

blue sky: If only I could become a bird – one of them – just for a moment. Then I wouldn't frighten them so. I could show them the way to warmth and safety. At the same moment, another thought dawned on him. He had grasped the whole principle of the Incarnation."

Now hopefully you can understand better why God took the form of a small child in the manger, a child in the Temple, an unassuming itinerant preacher and healer, in order to reach us. But that was over two thousand years ago, and God, in the form of Jesus, is no longer here. Who then is here to tell us to get up, to not be afraid during the trials and tribulations of life? Who is to model for us the love and concern of God for us now - that love, that moment, which can transform our lives and lead us to a relationship with God?

Well, there is the Holy Spirit. But what does the Holy Spirit look like? Hm-m-m, back to the unknown again. And aren't "spirits" somewhat scary? Well certainly, when we used to say "Holy Ghost," it conjured up some scary thoughts, especially when we were younger. I don't know if you've had a "mountain top" experience like the ones depicted in Exodus and Matthew today; I haven't had one, but it doesn't matter and I do hope that you have encountered God somewhere – in nature, in music or art, in an event, or a person radiating God's love like I have on many occasions. You can encounter God in many ways if you are open to it, even in the valleys of life. Hopefully, in the words of Allen McSween Jr., you "...were startled by the mystical in the midst of the mundane – the awesome among the ordinary - the breathtaking among the boring." At least, I hope that you have had confirmation that God exists, that God is real, and that God loves us, even beyond our comprehension at times.

And that brings me to my second, related point. Listen please to this story from the prologue of Max DePree's book, *Leadership Jazz*, about his granddaughter, Zoe: "Zoe was born prematurely and weighed one pound, seven ounces, so small that my wedding ring could slide up her arm to her shoulder. The neonatologist who first examined her told us that she had a 5 to 10 percent chance of living three days. When Esther and I saw Zoe in her isolette in the neonatal intensive care unit, she had two IVs in her navel, one in her foot, a monitor on each side of her chest, and a respirator tube and a feeding tube in her mouth.

To complicate matters, Zoe's biological father had jumped ship the month before Zoe was born. Realizing this, a wise and caring nurse named Ruth gave me my instructions. 'For the next several months, at

least, you're the surrogate father," (she said). I want you to come to the hospital every day to visit Zoe, and when you come, I want you to rub her body and her legs and arms with the tip of your finger. While you are caressing her, you should tell her over and over how much you love her, because she has to be able to connect your voice to your touch.'

God knew that we also needed both his voice and his touch. So he gave us the Word, his Son whom the world of the 1<sup>st</sup> century could see, and now the Holy Spirit whom we can't see but can feel, and also his body, the church. God's voice and touch say, 'I love you.' We, the church, those who purport to be followers of Christ, are to be the visible presence of God in this world, to all people. We have to be there to help people get up, we have to calm their fears, we have to reveal to them the love of God – so that they may endure the trials of this world and be transformed in order that they too may then help others. This is the way in which the Kingdom of God can exist in this world right now. And this world so badly needs the Kingdom of God. Therefore, I exhort you, especially as we enter the period of Lent this coming week, to be an active member of this community or the community where you live, loving and helping each other, and doing your Christian duty always. Those of us who have seen God, in whatever form, who know God, have to be the visible and comforting presence of God to everyone else! Let them see the face of God in us.

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.