

Fourth Sunday in Epiphany 31 Jan 2016

Jeremiah 1: 4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

[Epiphany 4C January 31, 2016](#) Textweek

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you



The readings call us to look beyond the confines of our tradition, and to look beyond the confines of our mortality.

There is a delightful paradox as we build (grow) toward the future so we become aware of the seeds that began the process of our becoming. We might marvel that within the acorn is the Oak tree, but do we ever marvel at the potential that we hold within ourselves?



We are, with each and every other, consecrated for a Divine life; and we each have a part to play in the unfolding of a divine tomorrow. We claim ourselves as 'the Body of Christ' and so we might also consider what scripture is waiting to be fulfilled in our hearing?

Start with a brief sharing of statistics from a book that is exploring the different types of church, or religious consciousness in relation to, and in parallel with, the evolving consciousness of humanity.

There are five stages of consciousness that are identified, and they apply to our culture as well as to our religious institutions;

1. Tribal consciousness, and here we will find the beginnings for some of the early religious magic and superstitions, this is where we adopted such practices as 'swearing on the bible'.

And the author suggests that 5-10% of people are at this stage of consciousness.

2. Warrior consciousness, this is where we find the attitude responsible for the 9/11 attacks and for much of the response to those attacks, it is the attitude of fundamentalism; and around 20% of peoples are at this stage of consciousness.

3. Traditional consciousness and also home of the traditional church; is the attitude of conforming and fitting in with the group, congregation and community; and 40-55% of people are at home at this stage.

4. Modern consciousness; and a sobering quote; "the dominant consciousness for most institutions in the civilised world is at the modern level, except for the world's religious institutions."

And the 5th stage is the Post-modern consciousness with around 5-10% of the world's people at this stage; if the 'modernist's' bumper sticker says 'question authority', then the 'post-modernist's bumper sticker says 'question reality'.

Hopefully that brief breakdown gives us an appreciation that there are many readings of the bible, for it is still a reference point in all of the different stages, and perhaps we'll also recognise ourselves and our own attitudes fitting into one or more of those broadly labelled stages. Throughout history we can also see a movement in the cultural evolution of civilisation and that also serves to enable us to look for similar movement in the evolution of who we are...

Three further numbers that are worth contemplating;

The stats we just heard tell us that the great majority, 65-80% of people in the world are at the pre-modern stages.

In addition, and an illustrative example, 33% of people in the USA believe the bible is the word of God and literally true word for word.

And, an interesting statistic that perhaps sheds some light on what might seem a slow evolution of consciousness; "90% of the scientists who have ever lived are living today".

The purpose in sharing that sketch of consciousness and its evolving toward an ever new understanding is to provide an invitation to explore the bible as one seeking, and to look for that which has not been seen before.

From the earliest of times religious traditions have presented models for 'life after death; and for many that has been a focal point for their faith.

In the second reading we hear two comforting affirmations: "8 Love never ends" and "13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

A primitive understanding, or perhaps a desire, that affirms for us that life goes on after death, and from such an understanding we have the notion of 'eternal life'.

Jeremiah, in the first reading says:

"Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you"

Why was that insight missed, why do we not also contemplate the life we had before we were born?

Perhaps it is of no interest to our ego, for our ego developed after we were born; however by missing this insightful contemplation we also miss the reality of eternity; for eternity is not about going on forever, it is not so much about continuity as it is more to do with singularity and wholeness.

If we consider Paul's statements: "8 Love never ends" and "13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love" alongside Jeremiah's we will see love stretching both before and after our presence on earth, and so will also come to the unravelling of original sin, for both our beginning and our ending are found in love's eternal wholeness..

This is actually too much for a Sunday sermon, but maybe it is a start; an opening beyond the 'traditional consciousness' and an invitation into a new understanding.

Today's gospel has a narrative of Jesus inviting the congregation in his local synagogue into a new understanding.

The Hebrew tradition is very much stuck in the 'tribal and warrior stages of consciousness' and at its best breaks into 'traditional consciousness'; Jesus gives them some clear biblical examples that demonstrate that God is operative not just to the faithful Jewish community but also to the alien, the ones beyond the barrier of border security.

And their response to a more enlightened worldview;

"They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

Does all this really matter? Yes it does, for if we too stay within the comfort and confines of our traditional consciousness, then for us also Christ will pass through our midst and go on his way.

The rise of fundamentalism that has filled the news broadcasts ever since 9/11, does have a positive side, it is a violent reaction to a civilisation that continues to evolve into new consciousness.

However, if we hold the traditional ground, we actually slow the process of conscious evolution; if we do not seek, and/or desire to embrace a fuller realisation of Christ's revelation, then we too will lose sight of the possibility that ,

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Two quotes to finish off, and they both come from 'science news'; don't listen to understand them, but listen to see if you can hear a new way of looking at the world:

"A first-of-its-kind measurement has quantified a mysterious quantum bond shared by several particles rather than just two. The experiment, reported in the Dec. 3 *Nature*, brings physicists closer to understanding the true scope of this link, known as quantum entanglement.

Entanglement interweaves particles' fates so that some of each particle's properties, which are inherently uncertain according to quantum mechanics, are tied to those of its partners. Each particle essentially sacrifices its individuality to become part of an umbrella entangled state."

"A new experiment provides the best evidence yet that the common-sense concept of locality — that an event on Earth can't immediately influence what happens on Mars, for instance — doesn't apply in the quantum realm."

We can value our tradition, however we should not be blinkered by it.