



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

CANADIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH
& CENTRE FOR PEACE

Sermon Preached By Bruce Sanguin

Luke 2:22-40

December 28, 2008

The Sunday after Christmas

“Christ – Revealer of Inner Thoughts”

Jesus is presented as the “revealer of inner thoughts” in today’s reading. So, I intend to focus on the interior dimension of spirituality – in the language of today, consciousness.

Consciousness is the most mysterious dimension of existence. In us, after 14 billion years, the universe has become conscious of itself. We are called homo sapiens sapiens - not merely conscious beings. We are the ones who are conscious of being conscious. The greatest conundrum of science these days concerns the nature of our “inner thoughts”, what I am equating this morning with consciousness. Most scientists believe that it is an emergent phenomenon. They mean by this that they are convinced that it was a latecomer to the universe. It emerged out of our neocortex, the part of us responsible for complex thought. But this conclusion has more to do with philosophical bias than scientific evidence. There are many other scientists who are concluding that it is a fundamental constituent of the universe. It was there right from the beginning and therefore can be found in lesser form throughout the universe – in atoms and ants, and dolphins and giraffes. Consciousness, for these scientists, doesn’t come out of a brain. It comes through the brain. Our nervous system is simply the most advanced conveyer of consciousness.

A person like Eckhart Tolle, who wrote the Power of Now and A New Earth, is trying to help us to understand that we can cultivate the capacity to bring awareness to our consciousness experience. And as we begin to identify, not with the forms that arise in awareness, but with awareness itself, we can experience enlightenment. We are that which is aware, not that which we are aware of.

After being dedicated to God in the Temple – as was the custom with first-born males, Simeon declares that this child is special. His presence, he predicted, would have a profound influence on the affairs of humanity. He would be responsible for the “rise and fall of many”. What this means to me is that the light of his consciousness would shine upon the world. Some would be elevated by it. They would evolve in spiritual wisdom and would serve the world from a place of wisdom – from pure awareness, which in the Jewish and Christian tradition is loving awareness – more personal than in Eastern traditions. We begin to realize that our personal consciousness is one with and an expression of God.

Others – those who were threatened by the light of loving awareness – would cling to the past and would fall. They would not have the evolutionary stamina to meet the challenges or life conditions they were facing. The point is

that Jesus was known for helping his followers connect with their interior life. This provided the motivation and the energy to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, and advocate for justice.

Humanity right now stands at a crossroad. The problems we face, as we head into 2010 can seem overwhelming; the collapse of our economic system; global warming, species extinction, the AIDS epidemic, terrorist threats, urban gang violence, poverty, food security. The list is long. I haven't even mentioned the challenges we face in our intimate relationships and in our personal lives. All of these indicate that yesterday's solutions are not sufficient for the complexities we face today. At core, all of these problems are crises of consciousness. We've lost touch with our interior or spiritual dimension. We don't know who we are. We will rise or fall depending upon our capacity as a species to shift into a new mode of consciousness. As a Christian, I would talk about this as the birth of Christ consciousness – the capacity to be the loving presence or awareness of Christ, not just talk about it.

I mean by this more than simply the return of traditional Christian values to society. There's nothing wrong with solid Christian values, but we will need to go deeper. The future of the church depends on whether we can offer to the world a new mind and a new heart for a new age. We must address our interior condition along with the way we behave. Just as the light of God – what our tradition calls Christ consciousness - shone in and through Jesus, so we must be carriers of

that light and be able to offer this to the world.

Put simply, we will rise or fall depending on whether we will be transformed by the love of God – loving awareness - and then offer this love to the world. And while the love of God may be unconditional, in the human realm it's radically conditioned. For example, when I became a Christian I experienced God's love in a rather dramatic fashion. I felt as though I fell in love with the whole world. But three weeks later, I was being taught that this love didn't extend to gay and lesbian people, or to people who didn't believe what I believed. The unconditional love was God was translated through a very limited vessel. My consciousness – my “inner thoughts” – got in the way. The point is that the experience of pure loving awareness is not enough – sorry Eckhart. It's the beginning, not the end. We need to keep growing and evolving in the realm of space and time – historically. If we don't we fall and we bring others down to the level that we ourselves are stuck at.

What happened to me – being an imperfect vessel of God's love – happens in every religious tradition. I've told the story before about Genpo Roshi, an enlightened Buddhist monk. It bears repeating. He has realized that enlightenment – realization of unity with God – is not enough. He says that the majority of enlightened Buddhist masters he knows are nevertheless homophobic, sexist, and authoritarian. They've had a genuine enlightenment experience. They know that they are one with all that is. But this gets translated into practice through a very traditional structure of consciousness. So for Genpo, enlightenment involves

both the experience of unity with loving awareness – God in our tradition – as well as growing into higher and broader levels of consciousness.

When the old priest says that Jesus will “reveal the inner thoughts” of people, he was saying that for Jesus life in God would be an inside-out affair. “The Kingdom of God is within”, Jesus taught. And it’s the same for us today. For many of us our Christian life has been an outside-in proposition. It’s about obeying the rules, believing the right things, and doing good things for others. Who can argue with these things? But what’s missing in this arrangement is deep connection with the Source and an intentional path of spiritual growth.

Some of us were taught to put the cart before the horse. But in this new era of Christ consciousness if we live by a social contract, and treat others with kindness, it will be because we’ve dipped into the pool of God’s Being and we’re still dripping love all over the place. This is what was so radical about St. Paul’s conversion experience. He had tried all his life to live by the rules – and became very frustrated and angry, because he could never quite live up to them. The rules condemned him, because he always fell short. Then he had an experience of Christ consciousness, the rules dropped away, and he lived from the inside out from that point on – by his heart. He experienced an incredible freedom. And noticed that Paul knew about both dimensions of the interior path – identifying with Loving Awareness, which he called the mind and heart of Christ” *and* needing to grow in faith: “When I was a child I spoke like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I

became an adult I put away childish things”. Paul knew we needed to evolve. It drove Paul crazy that Jesus’ disciples in Jerusalem still wanted to put the cart before the horse and live by the old laws and rules. They, of all people thought Paul, should know about the freedom of living in the loving awareness of Christ.

The world’s problems are a signal that we need to find our way back to the Source – to the heart of God. It’s actually not that long a journey. We’re already there, but it takes a little bit of work to realize it. That’s the practice of Christian faith. I’m more convinced than I ever have been that until there is a great transformation of consciousness we won’t have the intelligence, creativity, and wisdom to create the systems required to survive. There’s a role for the church in this, and as we embrace it in an intentional way – teaching about loving awareness and helping people to consciously evolve toward more complex stages of development – we will find our purpose in Christ.