

***Spreading the Word in 2009***  
by Rev. Durrell Watkins , MA, MDiv  
Sirach 24.1-12; John 1.14  
Sunshine Cathedral, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009  
**Eleventh Day of Christmastide/Epiphany Sunday**

The staff was thinking about putting on a talent show. As we were discussing it, I asked Todd, "What should I do? Comedy or singing?" He said, "In your case, what's the difference?"

I know, right? I get no respect. I'm the Rodney Dangerfield of ministry. But I had no chance with the family I had. If you were here on Christmas Eve, you heard the story about my great-aunt Gladys who joined a gym to get back in shape after the holidays and it didn't really work out. Well, since she didn't really have a good experience with the Jazzercise class, I suggested that we go on a diet together. I thought we could support each other, so I said, "Whenever I get a craving for a burger and fries, I'll call you." She said, "Great. I'll drive."

About half a millennium before our gospel writer pens what we now call the Gospel of John, a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus hypothesized that there was a divine unity connecting everything in the universe. Heraclitus had a name for this unity in or meaning of life. He called it an everlasting Word. The Greek is *Logos*. The Logos, the Perfect Idea, the divine Word is the law of life, the process that includes all life, that expresses as all life.

Interestingly, Heraclitus used fire as a symbol of the Logos. And our gospel writer uses images of brightness and light, similar to fire, when he says, "[The life of the Word/Logos] was the LIGHT of the human race; the light shines in darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it" (Jn 1.3b-5).

He also says, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (Jn 1.9). And, "We have seen [the Word's] glory..." (Jn. 1.14).

The Word of God is an interconnecting Web of Existence which excludes no one, It is the light of ALL humanity, and It enlightens *everyone*.

John takes the philosophical concept of Logos and even borrows the symbol of light which comes from fire to suggest that the divine light is with us, within us, connecting us to all life, leaving no one out for any reason.

But, of course, our gospel writer need not limit himself to the high minded musings of the ancient learned philosophers.

In the Hebrew bible, Lady Sophia is a mythological figure who is known as God's companion, some translations will say God's play mate, and She is an agent of creation.

Sophia means "Wisdom," so even in the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible), the Wisdom of God, the Word of God, the Divine Idea, is personified to demonstrate God's accessibility. The Wisdom of God is part of God's creation, She calls out to human hearts, and She promises to be found by those who seek after her.

We find Sophia, Ms. Wisdom in such deuterocanonical books as Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. But even if we didn't grow up having access to those texts, we can't easily dismiss Sophia, because She is also found in the book of Proverbs (she is featured in Proverbs 8).

Of course, Sophia/Logos, the Wisdom of God, the Word of God pops up in other places, such as when Luke has Jesus say that Wisdom is vindicated by ALL her children (Lk 7.35).

Over and over, the concept reappears...the Word of God lives among us: as Sophia in the Hebrew bible; as the Logos of ancient Greek philosophy; as the Word made flesh symbolized by John's understanding of Jesus.

Now remember, John is using Jesus to symbolize God's presence within us. He isn't suggesting that God's presence was limited to Jesus. Jesus symbolizes the light for John, but he will go on to refer to those who are enlightened by that light who abide in the Divine Nature represented by Jesus and who will carry within them the light of Christ. Jesus, then, is the Example, not the Exception. He represents the divine Presence that is already a part of each of us. It has become flesh and dwells among us/within us/as us.

The writer of John's gospel uses the songs and poems of Wisdom as a prelude to his gospel. He masterfully pulls together an early Christian hymn, an ancient pagan Greek philosophy, and the Hebrew scriptures to set the scene for his understanding of good news. And the good news is this: God longs to be in relationship with us. God is available to all people, without exception, regardless of our ethnicity, our social location, our gender, our sexual orientation, our dogmas, doctrines, or even our doubts. The Word of God becomes flesh and dwells among us...expressing in, through, and as us.

The phrase "lived among us" could be more literally translated as, "pitched a tent or tabernacle among us." The tent of meeting or tabernacle in the bible is where God's presence was experienced. And yet, John says the glory of God isn't limited to a place (he'll make that argument again in chapter 4 when he says God isn't bound to a location but is spirit and must be worshiped in spirit and truth).

John is writing at least 2 decades after the Temple of Jerusalem has been destroyed, and yet he says its not about the building. It's not about the altar. It's not about the decorations. It's not about the furniture. The presence of God is within us, living among us, pitching the divine Tent not in our buildings but in our hearts.

We love our windows and our organ and our candles and our vestments and our power point slides and our beautiful cross that we process in every single Sunday, reverence, and place in the front with a spot light on it...but guess what? All of that is for us. God doesn't need those things! We have these things because they suit our tastes; we hope those things will invite more people in. But that's what it's all for...to bring people in to have their own experience of the divine; for them to discover the presence of God dwelling within them. The Divine Idea has already pitched a tent of dwelling in every heart.

We worship not with things, but with relationship...by experiencing God in our own lives as the people we are. To worship in spirit and truth is to never limit the spirit to any place, thing, or single understanding.

In 2008 we experienced growth at Sunshine Cathedral. In 2008 we achieved a new level of fiscal health, transparency, and responsibility. In 2008 we extended our outreach even as we tightened our belts. In 2008 we increased our educational efforts. We increased our publications and we expanded our internet presence. We had to become a bit leaner but in doing so we also became stronger and more effective. We had a good year and we ended 2008 healthy, strong, dynamic and full of hope and joy. But that was foundation building. That was a beginning, not an end.

For 2009, I want us to focus on the Word...the divine Principle, the divine Idea, the everlasting Presence that is within and among us. I want us to commit to doing even more to reach out in unprecedented ways so that more and more people will know that the Light of God already dwells within them and is expressing as them. I want us to beef up our efforts to let more people know that there is a divine spark in every person; every person has sacred value. We are all part of the creation God calls very good. We are all made in God's image, filled with God's spirit. More people need to know that. We have a mission to continue Sharing the Light with the World.

Jesus said, "YOU are the light of the world. A city set on a hilltop cannot be hidden" (Mt. 5.14). We've built a good foundation, and now its time to build on it. I'm asking you to help us Share the Light in the following ways:

1. Pray. Simply ask God as you understand God to bless the Sunshine Cathedral so that Sunshine Cathedral can continue to be a blessing to others.
2. Show up. Your very presence consecrates our worship space. And the light of God within you will be a beacon of hope to someone else.
3. Invite a friend. We have a good time around here. Let's offer that joy to someone new this year.
4. Keep a positive attitude. Churches sometimes get in the sad habit of gossiping and complaining...none of which ever builds up the church or any individual. We've done a pretty good job of avoiding that trap. Let's keep up the good work by keeping our thoughts and our speech positive. The Word lives among us...let the word that we share always be a good one.
5. And finally, continue to support the ministries of your church with your financial generosity. Make a pledge to your church later this month, and then make keeping that pledge a priority in 2009. You were given today a brochure about how you can support the mission and ministry of Sunshine Cathedral in 2009. Take that brochure home. Read it. And in a few weeks, make a pledge to help us continue Sharing the Light with the world.

Pray for your church. Attend your church. Invite someone to church. Keep a positive attitude about your church. And contribute to your church. If we each will do those simple five things, then 2009 will be even better than 2008 was. And what that will mean is that even more people will come to understand that God's Light and Love is available to them, wishing simply to be expressed in their own lives. The Word dwells among us, and we have the opportunity to share that good word with the world. This is the good news. Amen.

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**The Word of Hope is within me!  
The Word of Encouragement is near me!  
The Word of God is blessing me now!  
And as one who is blessed...  
I bless others.  
Amen.**

"If you would learn the secret of right relations, look only for the divine in people and things, and leave all the rest to God." – J. Allen Boone