

Ok, relax. I am not going to throw superconductivity and other physics terms at you today as I did last week, but I do need to explain that it was *engineering* physics that was my undergraduate degree, so I sometimes identify myself equally as an engineer, and I mention that only because of the question I want to ask: "How would an engineer describe this [slide of half-full glass of water]?" Some of you said, "glass half-full" and others said, "glass half-empty." An engineer would describe this either as "inefficient" or "a waste of space."

I'm not pushing that view, but rather, trying to show how we can look without seeing what another might see, which at times, quite frankly, means we can look without seeing all there is to be seen; I'm trying to illustrate how we can look without comprehending fully what we are looking at.

Looking without comprehending is what characterized Job through the first two weeks we read from the book bearing his name, until last week's reading, our third, in which God addressed questions to Job. In today's reading, Job admits his failure fully to comprehend, -- and that concept of not fully comprehending is in our Gospel lesson as well, though let me return to that later.

In what we read in Job today, God has finished his questioning of Job, for those who remember last week's reading and what I am sure was a spell-binding sermon, finished his questioning in which God referred to the created universe and challenged Job by asking, more or less, whether Job could comprehend all that was involved in its creation. In today's reading, Job, suitably humbled, yielded to God's admonition and accepted the greatness of God's wisdom and power as evidenced in the created universe.

Seeing God through the created world or universe is what theologians refer to as *General Revelation*, beautifully captured in the Hebrew Bible in many places, such as in Psalm 8, from which I quote only two verses:

*When I look at the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
What are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them.*

Well, the created world is no less astonishing now than when this psalmist or the writer of Job wrote; the Grand Canyon is actually deeper now, and the Missouri is wider, though they of course knew neither. But while today we have legions of people worshipping nature and the environment in a somewhat *pantheistic* way, too few of them find God in the creation they worship in place of God. The universe is just a beautiful *accident* to them. Belief that the universe is an *accident* is the only alternative to belief in a creator god, but today, legions believe in that accident, so if those of us who have found God, who have found God through Jesus Christ, want to take Christ to people and bring people to Christ, we need to acknowledge that the task is not so simple as was God's questioning of Job, who *already* believed, but better *comprehended* only when having the magnitude and complexity of creation put to him.

Finding God through Jesus Christ. The French lawyer, John Calvin, to whom I personally owe the concept of *General Revelation*, posited a second kind of *revelation*. General Revelation yields sort of a fuzzy, non-specific, no clear characteristics other than power and ingenuity, *impersonal* god; it does not yield concepts such as *just, personal, loving*. *Specific Revelation*, also from Calvin, is God's revelation of God *in the person of Jesus Christ*, a revelation that gives us a more fully fleshed out, to make a play on words, sense and knowledge and *comprehension* of God. Our Gospel lesson presents such an occurrence of this form of revelation, and suggests to us the familiar words of "Amazing Grace," "Was blind but now I see," which fit that *Specific Revelation* to a tee.

So, given that the universe, or at least avoiding climate change therein, serves as the extent of any religious belief for the many who do not see a god behind creation, the question for Christ's Church, for all of us who say we want to be Christians and want others to know God as do we, is, "How do we help God in the act of Specific Revelation? How do we help those who fail to see God's revealing of God's self in creation, see God's revealing God's self through Jesus Christ?"

For though we all see imperfectly, I hope that you and I see God through Christ sufficiently clearly and with such gratitude that we want others to be privileged to see what we have found.

And how? Much of that answer is, "By revealing to others the presence of Jesus Christ in each of us, and in us collectively as Christ's Church." And as I ask often, though it is not today's main topic, how do we also make sure that we see Christ *in* others?

So how do we assist in *Special Revelation*?

I am not going to use my Walmart example today, and I do not want to retell of my self-serving action I once shared with some of you that led to the woman from Columbia's saying that "an angel" had helped her, so let me try another incident.

My earliest memories date from somewhere in the third or fourth year of my life, of which I am fairly certain because my closest sibling had to have been requiring much of my mother's attention at the time. We lived in what today would be called a row of townhouses along DesPlaines Avenue in Riverside, Illinois. Down the side or middle of DesPlaines Avenue there were tracks on which a street car ran, though probably not all that frequently. Somehow, I went out the front door and sat down in the middle of those tracks. I was old enough to know I should not, but knew little more. A man and a woman, whether walking or driving past, stopped, and asked me where I lived. I vaguely remember, but perhaps not correctly, that I did not want to tell them, but even if I did not, the possibilities were few and they returned me to a mother who had just realized I was not inside.

I of course was too young, but to my mother, whether she looked at it that way I never knew, these people were *revealing* Jesus for her to see, Jesus who said, "So much as you do it for one of the least of these, you do it for me."

Acts of caring for the well-being of others, acts of love, especially acts of love that most others would not do, raise the question, "Why did she," or "he," "do that?" "What explains that selflessness?"

"Why?" "What?" Last Saturday one of my colleagues was disposing of some books; one of the titles was *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. I read the book nearly twenty years ago after watching what I believe was a PBS program based upon it. It is the story of what happened during the Nazi occupation of a town in the southeast of France during World War II, a town named Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, then a town of about 5000, an *Hugenot* -- French Protestant -- village, whose inhabitants sheltered about 5000 Jews while being occupied by Nazi troops. "Why? What explains that selflessness?" Let me just say that the answer was obvious: they felt called upon to love all God's children by and through their faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ. The most anti-religious person in the world might wonder why they were so brave -- or foolish -- to do so, but would acknowledge that the faith that moved them was surely powerful and unselfish.

So too, we hope, non-believers would acknowledge about us, that our faith was powerful and unselfish, not so they could applaud us, but so that they might then see the Specific Revelation of Jesus Christ within us. When we do acts of love beyond "anyone would do that," people *can* see God *specifically revealed through the Christ in us*. In small ways, that is what we do through the [clothing/hygiene] project [, through our assistance program, and, next Saturday, I think, through the Halloween party in the parking lot].

We can help others see, help others to see *in us* what they might have been missing all these years; we can help others to comprehend the awesomeness of God's love.

I want to skip for a moment to a story that has parallels with both Job's blindness and the what-I-think was only spiritual blindness of the man in our Gospel lesson, which I think was the same spiritual blindness as that of the man in one of the most delightful stories in the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. It's the story of Balaam and his ass, for King James readers; in modern translations, the animal is named otherwise. Both our Gospel lesson and the story of Balaam and his donkey deal with our failure to see --but I want to use this latter story for a different purpose, since I am trusting that we *do* see.

As minimal background, one of two warring kings wants Balaam to go and pronounce a curse on the king's enemy, but this is apparently not in God's plan, and so:

*God's anger was kindled because he [Balaam] was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. The donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; so the donkey*

*turned off the road, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey, to turn it back onto the road. Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it scraped against the wall, and scraped Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck it again. Then the angel of the LORD went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!" But the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face.*

Do you get my point?

While we obviously do not want to be like Balaam, failing to see, as was the man in the Gospel story, There is a point I want to draw from this humorous story that is relevant to our being God's agents for *Specific Revelation*. Unlike the Huguenot people of Le Chambon - sur - Lignon, we may never be called upon to risk our lives as the way in which the Christ in us is revealed to others, but we all have opportunities to make donkeys of ourselves -- thought I was going to say something else, didn't you -- the opportunity to make donkeys of ourselves, drawing others to see not so much an angel standing in the road but to see the Christ within us, *being ourselves true angels*, which simply means, "messengers of God."

Ironic though it may seem, perhaps we are called to make donkeys of ourselves to enable the Balaam's of the world to see God through the Specific Revelation of Christ within us. Seeing Him, knowing Him, it will matter not whether the glass is half-empty of half-full, for seeing God yields lives fuller than they -- or a dull engineer -- would otherwise be able to experience.

Yes, we who have seen Jesus can joyfully make donkeys of ourselves. Indeed, many of you complement me on what a donkey I often make of *myself*, I assume it is meant as a compliment, so let us all join together in the effort.

In Jesus' name. Amen