

“The Colors of Faith: Blue”

March 23, 2014

Ephesians 2:1-22

1 And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-- 9 not because of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. 11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Today we continue our Lenten series with the color Blue. From the vast blue sky to the deep blue sea we can see blue all around us. Blue is associated with harmony, peacefulness. It is used to describe emotions for example we know what it means when someone is feeling a tad “blue”. Blue is also a color that is associated with faithfulness, or in this case our faith.

There is a song I learned when I was a child, and while I know some of you might view me as young now, when I was quite a bit younger I learned about the wise man and the foolish man. You know the song “the wise man built his house upon the rock, the wise man built his house upon the rock, the wise man built his house upon the rock and the rains came tumbling down. The rains came down, and the floods came up. The rains came down and the floods came up. The rains came down and the floods came up and the house on the rock stood firm.” In contrast the foolish man built his house upon the sand and his house ended up going “splat” with a big exultant hand smack!

Change those words a bit to the wise man build his house out of faith and the foolish man build his house out of works. It not only slightly shifts the perception of that particular song but it re-orientates our adult understanding of what the song does mean. We instinctively get it no matter which version we utilize do we not? Faith in Christ is the rock, the cornerstone. Not believing or having faith and relying on your societally dictated definition of good deeds is building your house on the sand. This is a familiar metaphor and image of Christ and of our faith.

I wish to share this with you from “Leaves of Gold”. This is by Spurgeon and is under the section entitled ‘Faith’.

Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God trusts God; and he that trusts God obeys God. He that is without Faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith.

We even discuss the difference between faithful and good living some in our scripture recall the profound words in verses 8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (NRSV)

So why does the color blue typically represent faith? Why not grey or brown, colors with which we would associate most rocks?

Blue in most of the colors of faith handouts equates to this faith. I struggled with the color selection wondering if perhaps they just needed another color after wiping out the logical ones to continue to expand upon this particular ideology. But then I remembered the ways we come into and express our faith. We fall back on particular understandings according to our theological framework.

John Wesley, whom we know as a Methodist, developed a quadrilateral that denotes how we look at and view our faith. For us as Disciples of Christ we primarily rely on a scriptural lens to view all faith understandings. Others approach through the lens of tradition, still others approach through the lens of the God experience. The fourth one is the one that few come at and no one lens is all encompassing so most of us come at our faith understandings with a bit of each, but the last is reason. Not just the logical conclusion of a problem to be solved but rather when we look around us, when we see the vastness of the blue sky, the unfathomable depths of the blue ocean sea we can not help but reason that there is something greater at work than ourselves. We can not help but reason and have faith that it is God.

We however enter the scriptures in an entirely different frame of mind. John Wesley's quadrilateral is helpful for those of us who did not live in the time of Christ or even in the time of Early Christianity. We can only make suppositions and rely on our various frames of reference to keep the faith. Paul, or one who wrote in the Pauline school of writing letters as this is a slightly disputed letter in the case of authorship, is describing a difference in our lives that is determined by our faith. In literary understanding this perichophy of scripture follows a before and after pattern. It depicts what our lives were like before our faith in Jesus Christ and what they become after. The writer even describes to us that we were "like everyone else". But after our faith changed and transformed us we were made new in our knowledge of what our faith has brought to our lives. The difference of the before and after effect of knowing Jesus as the Christ prophetically transcends the ages.

Paul also makes reference to the God who loved us and who created us. A God who loves us and created us. This is a God we are very familiar with in and throughout the New Testament. But if we turn back to the beginning of our scriptures to the book of Genesis. We will read two versions of the creation story. One found in Chapter One, the other Chapter Two. In the first it is almost a refrain but we know God created us and "it was very Good" which was a distinct show of favoritism over the other aspects of God's creation that were just "good". In the second version we know that God gave us the rights of naming animals. I almost envision this story like that of a small child introducing a favored toy to the rest of his or her belongings.

We from the beginning of creation were loved and beloved by God and set apart from the rest of God's creation because we were out of God's love and in God's image. We know how the rest of the story goes up until Christ. Mend and then sin, sin and then mend. It was a vicious cycle that all came to an end with the glorious gift of God to us God's beloved. "For God so love the world that God gave God's only beloved son who came not to condemn the world but to save it." (John 3:16-17 paraphrase)

So Jesus as the Christ and son of the living God was the sacrifice that saved the world, he saved me, he saved you, he saved each one of us. Now comes the tricky part. We have to accept it and believe in it. Acceptance is not an easy task. According to Webster's acceptance is a person's ascent to the reality of a situation no matter what. Inside the church we would call this acceptance, faith.