

Enriched Through Knowledge

Isaiah 49:1-7; I Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42; Psalm 40:1-11 1-20-08

Have you ever been at a get-together with family or friends and heard someone babbling on and on about something or other? After listening for a while you discover that the person speaking doesn't really have much knowledge about the topic and you think to your self, as you try to slip away, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

Many people take a little bit of knowledge about one subject or another and think they know all there is about it. Very often, they do not and they make those who do have a little bit more knowledge somewhat impatient with them.

"Knowledge" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as (i) expertise, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject, (ii) what is known in a particular field or in total; facts and information or (iii) awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation.

As we all grow older we should be in the process of becoming more enriched by the knowledge we gather either through education or through life experience. We should also become discerning about all we learn and know what to keep and what to toss away and what to share with others.

The first few disciples who followed Jesus did not know very much, if anything, about him. He must have been a very charismatic person to appeal to so many and to have them pack up and follow him from place to place without question. Their knowledge and understanding of just who he was and what he was grew to a point when they were with him, but they never quite grasped the whole picture. It took Paul, who never knew Jesus, to sift and winnow through what it was he had heard and to come to some conclusions, right or wrong, that were his.

While the search has been on for hundreds of years to uncover just who the historical Jesus was, very little has been discovered. There are a few sentences here and there in ancient histories that mention an itinerant preacher from Nazareth who was causing a bit of a stir. But there is no solid authorized or unauthorized biography that has been found as of this moment. Or, if one has been, it is being kept under lock and key.

Even though we do not have such a volume, through his teachings, saved for us in our scriptures, we can gain a greater insight into him and into the way of life he hoped we might follow. We need to understand when we read the stories of Jesus that, just as the pages of our Bible point beyond themselves to God, so does he. We are not meant to worship the words on a page but are meant to understand what lies beyond, somewhere out there—or perhaps in here. We are also meant to search for the deeper meaning in what Jesus said and taught and look through him as if through a lense to discover the nature of God. If we consider our scriptures in this light we cannot be Biblical literalists for we realize that there is more beyond the words for us to discover, uncover and begin to understand.

We believe, as Congregationalists, that we have the freedom to interpret the scriptures. "More truth and light will come from the word of God," we say and sing. No

two of our interpretations are exactly the same, nor can they be, because we all lead different lives and are at different places in our faith journeys. The stories of Jesus touch and move us in different ways. As a very tiresome popular little phrase reminds us, “It’s all good.”

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the evolution of the nation Israel as it grew from one stage of existence and understanding of God to another. The nation struggled to thrive and survive, but there would be a day that came along when the pathway would be easier and the knowledge of what it was God desired of that nation became clear.

In our reading for this morning we see a change in emphasis. This reading comes from the “Second Servant Song” and the change is in the mission of Israel as it moves from being a servant to God to becoming a light to the nations. All will change when other leaders and nations understand that Israel is the chosen nation and when they follow its lead.

Fast forward to Jesus beginning his mission. Much like the nation Israel the way he was seen was to change so that people would understand that he was the one to lead the way to salvation for those who had wandered astray. From being a wandering preacher to being a person who established a lasting religious system is a large step. But as more and more people learned the “good news” of his way of living and moving and having his being, they decided that way was for them. This happened through the spread of the letters of Paul and through the dispersion of the gospels written far after Jesus’ death. As people gained knowledge of Christianity many decided to follow it as a life giving way of living. Even in our diverse world, full of many ways of practicing religion, many still do. They have found there is sense in it for their lives and for the way they view and handle the world around them.

That is why we are here today, or I hope it is. I always hope that some small door may open through a hymn, an anthem, a reading or a word here and there that unlocks a place we have not ventured before in our hearts and minds. Then, I hope we have the courage to step through that newly unlocked door into a place of a refined understanding about all the life and teachings of Christ should mean to us. Very often the door is not unlocked by external forces but by an understanding that dwells and grows within us all along just waiting for us to know it is there.

A wise person once wrote: “The great teachings unanimously emphasize that all the peace, wisdom and joy in the universe are already within us; we don’t have to gain, develop, or attain them. We’re like a child standing in a beautiful park with his eyes shut tight. We don’t need to imagine trees, flowers, deer, birds and sky, we merely need to open our eyes and realize what is already here, who we really are—as soon as we quit pretending we are small or unholy.”

When we integrate all that is new to our understanding of how we must practice our religion with love, tolerance, patience, inclusiveness, forgiveness and joy, we find ourselves enriched through the knowledge we have gained in many different ways. Knowledge that dwells within us through the presence of God.

-- Amen