

1 Corinthians 2:1-12

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” - these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

When I was in college in Boston during my Junior year I needed an elective to fill out one semester's schedule. Now, I want you all to bear in mind that I went to a very focused business college that was founded by Roger Babson who conceived of a program of study in business while attending MIT as an engineering student. The program that was launched there at MIT eventually became what we know today as an MBA degree. And so, it suffices to say that I had lots of business focused classes up to this point...math, finance, marketing, economics.

So, that semester I decided to go in a different direction. I decided to take a class in art history at nearby Pine Manor College, a 100% women's college...(smile), in order to satisfy a liberal arts requirement that I needed. And yes, in the desire for full disclosure, in case you were wondering, at the time I was indeed dating a girl from Pine Manor and she was also taking that same class. Go figure, right?

Surprisingly though, the class turned out to be interesting, beyond the girl I mean. I saw paintings that I had never been exposed to before and learned to tell the difference between Doric and Ionic columns. Good information, I suppose...but what I found most intriguing was what was taught about the scientific Enlightenment Period.

Now, you're probably thinking, "Hold on, you said this was a class on art. What does the scientific have to do with any of this?" Well, one of the questions being asked by the professor in relation to art history was, "When did the Enlightenment begin? What were the first signs? And how do we know, how did they know, that a shift in history was coming?"

He made the case that it actually started before the 1600s. Well before that, well before the Royal Scientific Society in London was formed and well before the The Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris was founded, art took a turn. He would say that in many ways how the arts came to be embraced ushered in the scientific enlightenment. Without the Renaissance Period in art, the scientific enlightenment would not have come in the same way or at least at the same time.

Ok, now I'm sure that you did not get up this morning expecting to come to church and get a lecture on the history of art. But there is a reason that we might want to hear about this. There is a God reason that we might want to consider this, and also a reason that connects to Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth that we heard this morning.

You see, between 1300 and 1600 art changed. Now, I don't mean that we went from oils to water colors or from realism to impressionism. What I mean is *the reason* for art changed.

Before the Renaissance art was mostly seen as a means by which to see beyond ourselves into the eternal. Its purpose, at least a large part of its purpose, was to try to give us a glimpse, to focus our minds and our hearts outside of ourselves. It pointed to something. Art, at its core, recognized and glorified God. That was a primary reason for engaging in the act of creating art.

They looked at the world and within it they saw a beauty that was beyond human comprehension. They saw an amazing universe filled with stars and planets. They saw amazing mountains and vast oceans. Along with that, they felt a desire for meaning and love and peace within a world that seemed to have so little of those things. Much like us. And also, much like us, down deep, they knew that Joy and Peace and Love was just beyond the spiritual horizon, and so they tried to capture it on canvass. They saw what C.S. Lewis saw when he wrote, "If I find in myself desires that nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world." And so, prior to the Renaissance they painted looking towards that world.

They viewed the purpose of art as a means to provide a glimpse into things beyond this world. Paul would explain it later in this same letter, in chapter 13, when he described their perception of creation and the love it contains and the promise it holds. He wrote telling them that "For now we [only] see in a mirror dimly, but someday we will see face to face. Now we know [only] in part; in the future we shall know fully, even as we have been fully known."

When they painted, they tried to capture creation, as a God given place. They painted landscapes, trying their best to polish that glass that Paul talked about that is dim in this world. They painted portraits, trying to capture the soul of the person, of that child of God, along with

the outward, physical shell. When they painted their towns, so often you would see the rising steeple near the center pointing up above the roof lines to the Gift Giver, not just because that is where it happened to be, but because it spoke to who they saw themselves as.

However, by the time the Enlightenment came, about 1600, art had made a transformation; *the reason* for art made a transformation. No longer did it strive to look through the world into the eternal. It now was focused on the world as the pinnacle of all things. Their works were still beautiful. Their artists still were talented. It was just that capturing the world on their canvasses became the end goal. We became the object. We, and our lives, became the subject matter. We lost the desire to see beyond that, and art became whatever would serve our human perceptions and human emotions rather than what would take us beyond ourselves.

It was a great loss, and I think that Paul is trying to give us a glimpse to the eternal when he wrote to the Corinthians. He talks about things that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived. He tells the Corinthians that God has prepared something for those who have believed, something that is so much more amazing than what they could ever imagine.

I wonder what the world looks for today? I wonder what the end goal of the world's searching is today. How, and through what, do we see "heaven" in our time?

Do we catch a glimpse of Heaven in the peaks of Glacier National Park with a distant storm hanging on the mountain and sun drenching the valley? Do we see the hand of God in the abundant fields of Kansas and Nebraska or in the lakes left by huge by-gone glaciers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan? Do we marvel at creation from a beach at Edisto at sunrise or Key West at sunset? Or are these now just tourist attractions to feed our desire to see outward to God that was long ago transformed and transferred inward?

But here is the kicker that Paul tells us this morning. He tells us that, even though there are things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things that are even beyond what the heart can imagine, the Spirit of God can and will give us an amazing glimpse of that Joy and Peace and Purpose within our lives, even today, if we will seek it.

And the glimpse is not *just* through the huge mountains and the giant oceans. The glimpses are all around us every day. In a glass of water given to a thirsty person...in a smile shared with someone in despair...in a prayer offered in the midst of someone's struggle...in the Communion with God found at the altar rail. Even in a glimpse through an art history class forty years ago. In all these things and so many other seemingly ordinary acts, the Spirit of God will show us a small glimpse of the inconceivable joy that God offers.

And then something even more amazing comes. Then our lives, the lives of disciples, become glimpses of Heaven for others who are not yet able to see beyond this world. *That* is the mission that we heard about from Isaiah this morning and *that* is the mission that God calls us to.

Amen