



## ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON  
11-21-10

This poem is called Utterance: “Sitting over words – very late I have heard a kind of whispered sighing – not far – like a night wind in pines or like the sea in the dark – the echo of everything that has ever been spoken – still spinning its one syllable – between the earth and silence.

This poem is about faith. Foundations: “I built on the sand – And it tumbled down, I built on a rock – And it tumbled down. Now when I build, I shall begin – With the smoke from the chimney.”

Here is another poem put together by two different authors:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation: for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

“We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels – everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment.”

Four poems – each, I pray, bringing into your mind, mental images, pictures that are formed from the words, but also beyond the words. Each one, I pray, challenging your sense of reality, and enlivening your imagination.

You may have recognized the last two poems as a part of our Colossians reading today. The first reading using the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible and the second from The Message translation of the Bible. Each seeking to present the same image, each using different words to do so. Each seeking to bring us into a vision of the wonder and completeness of the Christ in our world. In these poems we find a reflection of God present in Christ, surrounding us and lasting throughout all of the ages. The completeness of Christ – the image of the invisible God – holding all things together.

These words move us beyond a reality that can be seen and touched. These words give us a glimpse, a vision of the world that can not be fully explained, the mystical, the movement of the

Spirit, the world of God's presence. And in every instance of hearing or reading poetry, it is words that try to inspire us to imagine that which can not be seen. We must be caught up – we must be willing to be transferred into the Kingdom of God through our spirit, through our imagination.

Sometimes we adults tend to dismiss the imagination as child's play, as fantasy, as a world out of touch with reality. And perhaps that is literally true, but how sad for us if we limit ourselves to a world of facts and what some wish to label as reality. And how sad for our faith formation. "Faith," says theologian James Whitehead, "is the enduring ability to imagine life in a certain way."

The author of the second poem that I read, the one called Foundations was written by Leopold Staff, a Polish man in Poland after WW II when that was literally nothing left around him. His poem of naked faith touches on a child's imagination of creating a picture of a house, starting with smoke coming from the chimney. That is what is left for one to do, start to draw the picture and live into that reality, the world of possibilities and starting over. To live with faith.

And the Colossians reading today is actually an ancient poem, or hymn that invites us to see reality in a new way. The apostle Paul takes these words and places Jesus, the Christ as the center of all that is important. He places Jesus as central to all things – rooted totally in the presence of God, bringing all of us into a mystical, but totally life giving relationship with God through Christ. These words invite us to move beyond the words into a vision – a vision that makes use of our imagination and our senses, because the clues to God's existence come to us through all of our senses. The reality in front of our eyes is not deep enough to contain the creator. When we sense God's presence, we glimpse another reality, one that we may enter only by the door of our imagination.

So you see - the act of faith is an imaginative act. In a chapter about the imagination written by the preacher Barbara Brown Taylor, she writes: "In faith, we imagine ourselves whole, we imagine ourselves in love with our neighbor, imagine ourselves bathed and fed by God, imagine the creation at peace, imagine the breath of God coinciding with our own, imagine the heart of God beating at the heart of the world. It is a vision of the kingdom, but is it true or false, fact or fiction? That is the question God continues to ask of us: What is real to us, what is true, and what do we intend to do about it?"

Will we find ourselves sharing in the inheritance of the saints in light? Will we allow ourselves to be transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins? Can we be caught up and made strong with the strength that comes from God's glorious power? Please, may it be so.

Thanks be to God.