

28B 2021

The disciples want proof.

What are the signs, Jesus?

How do we *know* when the world is ending?

And what does Jesus respond?

He says that many people will try to get us to believe that *they* know, but we should not be fooled by them.

Those who want to convince us that they know such things are interested not in God, but in having power over us.

It is a mark of spiritual maturity that we allow things to unfold.

The reality is that God speaks to us most often not through signs, but in our hearts, not by revealing the future, but the next step.

We know that it is the voice of God when we feel hope, joy, love.

Jesus explains to his disciples that, when it comes to God, knowing with their heads is less important than knowing with their hearts.

Our hearts are where God speaks to us, yet we have been taught that following our hearts is foolish.

We have learned not to trust ourselves, to dismiss what we sense to be true.

I experienced this as I worked towards a career.

When I was in grad school in the Religion Department of the University of Virginia, I wanted to study Buddhism, Christianity, and ethics.

My advisor rejected my interests because, he said, I would never get a job.

He was probably right that I would never get the kind of job he had in mind, but that was not the right kind of job for me, anyway.

The fact that my heart was leading me elsewhere was lost on him.

He refused to sign my add card until I wrote on it what he decided.

I had to study Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

The result was that I studied and quickly forgot much of what I learned because I had no interest.

He finally asked me to leave the university.

At that point, UCLA showed interest.

(I later learned that this was more of a political act than an actual desire to work with me.

A professor at UCLA disliked intensely my advisor at UVa. and saw attracting me as a way of getting back at his enemy.)

I wish I had had someone to assist me in discerning where God was leading me, how God was speaking to me in my heart, but most people look not within, to where God speaks with us, but without, to current trends.

The result was that I was preparing for a career that I did not want, to which I was not called.

The longterm result of all this for me was that it took me years to get back to the study of ethics and Christianity.

It is clear to me now that God was calling me in a certain direction.

We ignore that at our own peril.

People tell me God does not speak to them, but the reality is that God *never stops* speaking to us.

We simply do not listen.

Recently, an acquaintance said to me that the theology he grew up with felt wrong.

He could not square it with a loving God.

He then dismissed his own feelings as insignificant because that is what we are taught to do.

I encouraged him not to do that.

God is talking to him through his heart.

How else would God communicate with us but through our feelings?

Some have reduced this listening to our hearts to “conscience,” but it is more than conscience.

It is about more than just good and evil.

It helps us to know what needs to be done, what needs our attention and what needs setting aside.

It helps us to follow God's will for us in big things and small.

When we struggle against God, when we resist, we may feel knowledgeable, in control, superior, but we also lack peace in our hearts.

We feel a tension that we may ignore, dismiss, or seek to numb in various ways.

The only way to resolve this tension is to attend to it, to recognize it for what it is—a tension between our own agenda and that part of us that is God.

When the voice is one of accusation, shame, or fear, it is not the voice of God.

God speaks to us gently, not in tones of denunciation.

Richard Rohr reminds us that *Satan* is the accuser.¹

Ha Satan in Hebrew literally means “the accuser.”

The voice of guilt is also not from God.

Someone else implanted that voice there.

Guilt does not lead to peace in the heart, to peace with God.

1 Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 88.

It is a kind of mental sleight of hand in which one part of our ego judges the other part and convinces itself that it is good because it is separate from and recognizes the bad in the other part.

Christianity is not about internal division, but wholeness.

Fear is also not of God.

Before the angels (the messengers of God) speak, they always remind us to fear not.

In other words, when we are afraid, we are in danger of not hearing the message from God.

Self-hatred is also not from God.

If we hate ourselves, if we take masochistic delight in self-denial, then we hate God within us.

We cannot hate the one without hating the other.

Peace, hope, joy are the results of accord with God.

They tell us that we are on the right path.

Worry is not a Christian virtue.

We move forward, doing the work of God in faith.

People look for signs *because* they do not trust their hearts, do not listen to God.

The disciples implore Jesus, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?”

Jesus wants them instead to listen to their hearts as it guides them day by day.

We need not look for signs, need not be led astray by those who pretend to know, by those who are guided by fear, guilt, and shame.

God, who is part of us, has already provided us with all we need.

Sadly, we have been trained not to trust our own feelings.

We have been alienated from our own being and from God, which results in tension that manifests as guilt, fear, shame.

In order to be at peace with God, we have to be willing to listen to this tension, to recognize it and let it go as we harmonize with God who is part of us.

Sometimes, the answer we seek is not yet available.

We must be patient.

A life in accord with God is not about knowing all the answers.

It is about waiting and listening.

In fact, prayer is less about talking to God out there than it is about listening to God in here.