

Wisdom of Solomon 1:16-2:1, 12-22; James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37
18th Sunday after Pentecost B; 09.22.24; G. Miles Smith+

I know that my homily last Sunday was a hard teaching—*following on a hard teaching from Jesus*. I know that some of you found it helpful. And I wouldn't be surprised if some of you weren't quite sure. But what I've been trying to do *for you...and myself...is to identify the means ...to faithfully navigate...as Christians...the stresses and strains of these months ahead*. While many important things are at stake in the months ahead for us as a nation-- *what is at stake here at Grace...is whether we can encourage and support one another...to find a way forward...as Christians*. |

Let me begin my thoughts today by *rephrasing the Collect of the Day*.... So, if you want, you can take a look there in your bulletin, for that Collect earlier in our service...and this is how I could rephrase it:

“Help us, Lord...because we *are* anxious about earthly things...and we *want* to love *things heavenly*...but just *where* are they really...“while we are placed among things that are passing away”? We really do...want to know... how to *hold fast*...to those things...that shall *endure*...through Jesus Christ our Lord.” |

It is probably fair to say that there was a long time in my earlier ministry...when I had a fairly limited imagination...for “things heavenly”... And it wasn't just me...because I've come to realize that over the last five hundred years or so, the Church has inherited a way of thinking about “things heavenly”...that has largely been limited to *what happens later...after death*. And so I too mostly only thought about the heavens...at funerals.

But that wasn't the way that Jesus talked. The gospels tell us that the primary message of Jesus was about the *Kingdom of Heaven*...and he was *not* talking at funerals...but in the midst of everyday life. When Christians have limited our thinking of “things heavenly”...to *after-death*...as I did for a long time...then that *diminishes* our ability...to think about and recognize... *that “things heavenly” exist even now*. And this is not some *esoteric* matter...but something very *practical*...when “*things earthly*” get very heavy to bear. “Grant us, Lord, not be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly...”

What if “things heavenly” are, at the very least: *an aura of sorts...when some kind of love...and an awe...comes for us*? What if “things heavenly” in fact are already so familiar and so pervasive...that most of the time we can hardly recognize them for what they are?

Yes, our minds are elsewhere and everywhere these days...anxious about many things. And as the biblical book, the Wisdom of Solomon, says: Our reason...our ability to think like godly persons...too easily becomes clouded...and we are led astray...unable to know the “secret purposes of God”...and we are deprived of hope and discernment. |

In various forms of *spiritualism*, an *aura* refers to an energy field...that supposedly surrounds a person...and reflects something of the essence of that person...and that aura may be “seen”...by others...who have a gift of a special spiritual sight. Now I don't have any direct experience of that myself...but I have known people who have. So that kind of aura is pretty mysterious. But there is also a broader definition of an “aura”...which for me...is more useful...which points to...*a distinctive atmosphere or quality...that surrounds a person, thing, or place*.

So, what I would suggest to you...is that in the midst of all the daily things...things earthly...and even anxious...that it is possible for an aura to appear...*in the moments...when some kind of love...and awe...comes for us*. The Letter of James, says: Yes, “...there will...be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits...” And those gifts from above...are already here...

- The people who invite our love.
- The creatures who invite our love.
- The places which invite our wonder.
- The moments which invite our awe.

Outside, there are birds flying and singing....trees readying themselves for fall...places in the fields and woods that call to us...the morning sun...the soaking rain...the evening dusk...the breeze that touches our faces.

There is that quiet time with that book. There is that music that lifts us up.

There are these Sunday prayers...that scripture...even that homily...that unexpectedly comes alive with heavenly fire like Moses before the burning bush.

There is Holy Communion where in the midst of all its familiarity the veil can suddenly open between things earthly and heavenly.

There is the Communion of Saints now and on the other side of death...and the *holy angels* now and on the other side of death...and the *heavenly* now and on the other side of death.

And there is...Jesus Christ...who lives and reigns in the Holy Spirit, now and forever. (Amen.)

The auras...of things heavenly...are everywhere. |

Yes, we have to contend with anxious earthly things...and we all have great responsibilities in this time of our lives. |

But for people seeking to follow after Christ...we...have also been invited to see among the earthly...the auras of the heavenly... “Gifts of God for the People of God”...and to lift up our hearts...for courage...and hope.