

“Do You Hear It Too?” by Will Ramsey

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Image adapted from Hokusai (1760-1849)
“Under the Wave off Kanagawa”

SEEKERS CHURCH
A Christian Community
in the Tradition of Church of the Saviour
Lent 2018
The Foolishness of Faith

Second Sunday in Lent

Twelve years ago, in my men’s group, I created a mission statement which continues to resonate deep within my soul. The mission is: “I will use my compassionate voice to inspire others and myself and I will build connections of trust.” It’s through the lens of trust building that I speak to you today. Celebration Circle’s suggested theme for Lent is “the foolishness of faith.” This is a great theme for what I have to say today because I believe that this very foolish faith is necessary for us to hear God’s calling in each of our lives and God’s calling to us collectively.

I re-read many recent sermons as I prepared to share the word today. In so doing, I believe that I heard God speaking through others and, I believe, I heard God calling us to a transition in our collective call, or perhaps a new way of defining who we are as Seekers. Do you hear it too? Here is a little recap with quotes: Back in November 2017, Marjorie said

our theme for the winter season is "Finding Treasure in Darkness." She went on to say, "I do think there are times when all of us feel lost and alone. When we feel totally isolate and don't see the value in sharing what little we have – when we seem to be lost in the dark. And yet life in this community continues to remind us that in the end, love wins."

Kevin Barwick, when he preached during the same period, said, "May we hold the paradoxes, learn to love even better, not be comfortable, willing to go into the darkness's of our life, and find truth and freedom by way of pushing back and breaking down barriers of tribal/superior thinking. I mean if we have to try hard," he asked, "then where is the Divine love?"

My wife, Teresa, said in November, "When I am conscious of the Presence of God I am joyful. When I lose that consciousness, I am in pain. Heaven to me would be a total consciousness of the presence of God. "

Larry Rawlings said just a few weeks ago that "All of us more readily think about God when we are in need."

Sandra Miller told us in January that "My flawed soul aches for many reasons...yet I am trying to do the best I can."

Oswaldo Montoya told us that "all of us who are in this room—most of you American citizens, and documented immigrants like myself— have a responsibility, a moral obligation, a Christian duty to do something about these injustices. (He was speaking about immigration abuses)."

Okima Bryant noted that "we all need to bridge the gaps and close any opportunities politicians may use to divide us."

Deborah Sokolove, in her recent sermon, pointed out that "words matter. Images matter. When Peter saw Jesus transfigured into a divine being that radiated light and moved beyond time and space, he was so surprised that he didn't know what he was saying. I invite you to join me in paying

attention to what we are saying about God and about ourselves. Using creative, inclusive language to talk about God is an integral part of our work for peace and for justice.”

The heartfelt words of people in this community comfort me; but then I wonder, just really wonder, what are the stories of promise and hope from those who haven't spoken yet? I read in the Seekers web site that we are a solid, creative God seeking, service-oriented community. The poetry, the art, the music, the missions and the eloquent words that describe it all are there for our inspiration and for future generations to come. And filtering through the words it does seem that we are in transition. What prompted Kevin's questions about our dark side, asking if we are seeking the Divine or Billy Amos asking "Who are you? [Suggesting that we probably] ask that question of everyone we encounter, whether aloud or silently... [trying to understand] What story do you belong to."

In today's reading from Mark, Jesus and Peter had words with each other and Jesus gave the final word, saying that "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man." Today I want to talk about the things of God.

And you are probably thinking, "What are the things of God?" Just think, in over 2000 years of people telling future generations about the Holy One, they don't agree. So here I am at Seekers Church today and I admit that when I was preparing to share the word, I was at a loss for how to start. Teresa tried to help by offering me a book called the God Seekers, which contains examples of twenty centuries of notable Christian Spiritual thinkers and their writings.[\[1\]](#) Wow. The lives and writings of thirty-three Christian masters were brought to life. Eight of these writers were women.

Julian of Norwich, a saint who lived in the fourteenth century found "where Christ appears peace is received, and wrath has no place. p.140 Many avenues of Christian thought was laid out through the years including John Calvin with the

Presbyterians, Martin Luther with the Lutherans and John Wesley with the Methodists. Their words served many and still do today and, I might add, cause much division. Sorry, that is a different topic.

The most recent writer was Rosemary Radford Ruether, was born in 1936 and is still alive. She is an American feminist scholar and Catholic theologian, who lives in Minnesota. She writes, "Whether we gather in living rooms, warehouses, or church buildings, the marks of the authentic church are the same. The church is where the good news of liberation from sexism is preached, where the Spirit is present to empower us to renounce patriarchy, where a community committed to the new life of mutuality is gathered together and nurtured, and where the community is spreading this vision and struggle to others." [2]

Ruether's approach to spirituality, like that of most feminists, is holistic; affirming viewpoints apparently opposed to each other...She calls them 'dissenting voices,' as "correctives to the dominant patriarchal tradition." Then the statement that opened my eyes to my current discomfort: "To see things as either-or, good or bad, light or dark, true or false, is to devalue half of God's creation." [3] When I take sides I'm limiting God's presence in my life by maybe 50%.

So why do the words of Rosemary Ruether resonate with me? I'm not a desert mystic or a religious scholar, but I do understand Jesus when he tells us that love is the key and I believe that we do not have to devalue the "other half" to experience liberation, joy and salvation. Elizabeth Gelfeld recently pointed out that Seekers Church has "repeatedly forged a new order of living as part of the body of Christ." She asked, "Can we continue to let go of the old ways and embrace the unknown?" She then asks, "has the time come to turn our attention and energy to something new?"

The gift we Seekers can offer as a church community is to show

how to love without devaluing the other half. Just a few weeks ago John Morris left us with a thought: "to love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, and to love your neighbor, human and non-human, as yourself, is the greatest metanoia of all which is a rebirth, a metanoia, a repentance, a new life. We need amazing grace." We need this grace because rational arguments will never convince anyone to love the "other half."

We can together refine our spiritual container that offers layers of opportunity and a range of choices that can make each of us feel welcome. Really, it is like creating the dance of Interplay which has the power to make everyone feel included. Words and images are important. The fragile structure of a spiritual safety net is also important. We can create a place of safety for all, regardless of their point of view or status. We and our neighbors need a spiritual safety net. Seekers can offer this spiritual safety net beginning when we enter the spiritual shelter each Sunday and when others find our door and the "foolishness of faith" begins.

I would like for all who are present at circle time to experience the sacred and, by the time they/we leave, be transfigured by the light. Even when I do not fully understand the experience myself, I want to leave knowing I was touched by something greater than taking sides and know that I was in the presence of love. The questions of belonging: do they accept me? and will I fit in? dissolve. The Kingdom of God or promise as I see it is the experience of being with people who have the courage to be vulnerable.

Vulnerability makes me think of Cynthia Dahlin's sermon when she said, "... I will try to remain awake, and learn from my life, and try to do the work set in front of me. It may not be my job to bring the kingdom of God alone, but it is my job to use the lessons of my life and to try to do my little part.

And I feel like God is here by my side—as soon as I was getting comfortable and complacent, she shook the tree a

bit—I'm awake!"

We are in the middle of many calamities. Maybe politics comes to mind, but within the past two weeks I have listened to over twenty people, including my thirty-seven-year-old nephew talk about the fears and possibilities of being in prison. How many people do we know who are suffering from health problems? financial problems? loneliness? Etc.? In my view, we belong to a culture of people who feel compelled to take sides. The super bowl, politics, work, churches and even families take sides. We need to offer experiences of hope which extend beyond taking sides.

So how do we do this? What am I talking about? Although I could give a few examples, everyone needs to be a part of the creative, mystical, prayer centered listening that is needed. Just as the Holy One spoke to people in the desert, the Holy is whispering to each of us.

I would like to demonstrate the challenge before us. We are going to create a Mobius stripe. Notice the strip of paper that I gave you. One side represents the "onstage side of your life." The other side represents back stage side of your life. Later you can reflect on what adjectives describe your onstage side and what describes your back stage.

1. For now, please notice that I have attached Velcro to each end your strip of paper. Turn to the side that says, "Onstage."
2. Attach the two pieces of Velcro together to form a bracelet. What do you notice about the bracelet? The onstage is totally on one side and the back stage is separated and totally on the inside.
3. Now pull the Velcro apart and hold each end in your hand.
4. You will notice that one end has Velcro on both sides and the other only has Velcro on one side.
5. With the side that only has one Velcro tab turn it

gently over.

6. Reattach it to the two-piece end forming a figure eight more less. What do you notice?
7. Now take the two ends apart. Ask a neighbor if you can wrap your bracelet around theirs and reattach the two ends.
8. What do you notice?

We are now ready to embrace the other half. We learn by being together in a container that invites vulnerability; that allows for our own “on stage” and “back stage” sides to be seen and is also connected with other people.

I propose that we create a Circles of Trust Program for our church community. This could start with our common time together which is worship on Sunday morning, including Circle Time, worship, and socializing after the service. These are the times we need to experience safety and connection so that we can be vulnerable with each other. It is not a time for fixing, advising, or setting each other straight. Every minute we are together is sacred space. Let's replace the announcements, the advertising, the sign-up sheets, the sermon reviews, and social time with Circles of trust. Let me be clear. The things we are doing have worked effectively. They are extensions of what already exists in religious and socially minded communities. I say, however, we are ready for a renaming, reshaping of the ways we cast our spiritual net. We can't put new wine in old wine skins.

The concept behind Circles of Trust is to create a third way for responding to people and ourselves. Activities can range from two, three or more people gathering for a time from short to long and which could become a structured part of a worship or community gathering time. More importantly, at least at the beginning, is the opportunity to create time limited circles so we can connect to each other. Please note I am not advancing a new idea, this concept was advanced by Parker Palmer and The Center for Courage and Renewal, which is still

active today.

Sunday morning is our gateway. It is a chance to practice building bridges. All our voices will be heard. For at least one day a week we will know what it means to be divided no more on the journey to an undivided life.

Amen.

[\[1\]](#) Schmidt, Richard, *The God Seekers*, 2008.

[\[2\]](#) Id at p. 357.

[\[3\]](#) Id at p. 354