

Jackie McMakin: Head and Heart and Spirit

Sermon at Seeker's Church

by Jackie McMakin

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Head and Heart and Spirit

The question I want to raise this morning is, is this a propitious moment in our lives and in the of the culture to explore and redefine our theological and spiritual home?

Where am I coming from? This is not a fly-by-night thought. I have been thinking about this ever since I returned to Seekers. I want to say right out that I feel very at home at Seekers, and very at home at the Church of the Saviour.

David and I came to the Church of the Saviour in the nineteen-sixties after serving in Korea where we heard about the Church of the Saviour from the missionaries there.

I loved the Church. Mary Cosby was my sponsor. Jimmy Lu Mason and Mary Anders and Fern Edwards shared a mission group. Gordon mentored me in many ways. Also, Gordon and Mary visited Dave and me and visited his office in AID to honor Dave's work there. All of these things made me feel very much at home.

Thus when Sonya and Fred issued the call for Seekers twenty years ago, Sonya and I had many discussions about this and I felt that I was in on it from the very beginning. When I returned I felt at home.

So why am I raising this question? Because it interests me. I think about it all the time.

Now I want to say that in contrast to the prayers you have just heard, which are so heartfelt, I unabashedly am taking us on a head trip. I like to put head and heart together, but I am focusing on head today.

Years ago I took some training at Faith at Work. It was a leadership training institute that they sponsored and they talked about the window of wholeness. The idea was that people come to faith in different ways. Some through the will; some through emotions; and one through the intellect. That was me. Ever since I was a little kid I have been trying to make sense of all this spiritual stuff. I think the reason is that I grew up in a home that had a spiritual vacuum or religious vacuum. We were nothing.

I wanted to be something. So I went on a quest for that something. In the beginning it was a secret quest. I tuned into radio programs broadcast by the Greyfriars in New York on the lives of the Saints, and I was captured by that. They were people who were really committed to living out of their faith. I talked with my Catholic neighbors about why they crossed themselves and gave up things for Lent and things like that.

Finally I wandered into a Presbyterian Church where God came alive for me. Then my question was, Why isn't God alive for everybody?

So I continued the quest. I majored in religion in college and I had a wonderful time going through college.

Then I took a year in Scotland as a junior. The Scottish system of education isn't the theological college at St. Andrews. It was laissez faire. You could do anything you wanted so I had a year of independent study there. I then returned for my senior year.

Then Dave and I started our life in Japan and Korea, where we got to know a wonderful Asian Christian for whom faith was

really vital. Also we knew wonderful missionaries who were totally dedicated to their call.

This is a very rich background for coming to the Church of the Saviour. It was just great.

So why am I raising this question?

I want to say that I am really wondering if it is time to redefine our theological and spiritual life around the focal point of the Spirit?

When Gordon and Mary got going after World War II and founded the Church of the Saviour that we love, they were young people and they listened very carefully to the Spirit. They wanted to redefine the Church and reinvent the Church for our time.

They came up with wonderful qualities they wanted in their church; interracial, ecumenical., commitment and so forth.

Then Sonya and Fred and the others who started Seekers did the same thing twenty years ago.

So my question is whether it is time to do it again. Of course, we are doing it all the time. I hear people saying, "What's so new about what you are saying. We do that all the time."

I think we are, but what I wanted to do in this sermon was to establish an energy field for that. I can't do it in one sermon, but I would like to see an energy field just as powerful as Patrick and Molly's energy field is for the physical goal.

I am thinking about a lot of ingredients for the energy field. When I was in Scotland I came across a book called The Religions of Authority and Religions of the Spirit by a Frenchman. The point of the book was that there many religions of authority and some use the authority of tradition. The Catholics might be one under that banner. Others used the

authority of the scriptures and many mainline Protestants would be under that banner. The author was lifting up a third way; the religion of the spirit.

Listening to the Spirit in each time and culture brings forward ideas that have an authority of their own. They are based, not on the authority of others, but on the authority of actually experiencing the spirit yourself.

This has come alive for me, and I will tell you why.

For many years my work – Peter said I did my Masters on the Church of the Saviour and you could say that most of my work has reflected the best of the Church of the Saviour ideas. For many years my work was centered with church people. Four of my partners are here today, and we got going as a Catholic and Protestant group to form something like a School of Christian Living for the road. Our effort was to bring forward the most alive stuff we had gotten from our Catholic and Protestant traditions and share that. I loved that work for a long time. Finally, though, I let it go.

The reason I let it go was because Sonya and I had formed another mission which we called "Working From the Heart." There, our effort is to help people find meaningful work. We were convinced, and Susan, my new colleague, and I are convinced, that the spirit is essential to finding meaningful work. So part of our work is to bring that alive, help that come alive for people.

But most of the people who come to us now have, in some way or fashion, turned off by the Church. They have been wounded and they have had a version of Jesus that is bigoted, imperialistic, unappealing, dogmatic, and is totally unattractive for them. So Jesus does not seem to be a doorway to faith.

So Sonya and I, and Susan and I, have spent a lot of time trying to translate what we know about spiritual life in

language that is acceptable to these folks.

Several months ago Hollis preached on the Loving Way and he asked us to talk about stories of the loving way. Real life stories of how that is happening among us.

I would say that in my experience I have had many wonderful stories of the Loving Way come to me through the people in our seminars who say for the first time, "The spiritual life is making sense to me."

I want to bring them to a community, or recommend a community, so we started a list of recommended faith communities for people. You know; it's like four stars for a restaurant. We have a whole list of those that we can give to any lay person.

In my heart, though, I want to bring them to Seekers, or at least recommend Seekers.

Now that is not the only reason I am suggesting that we redefine our life around the Spirit, but it is one piece of it.

If we did that, where would Jesus be?

I do not think that Jesus would not be there. It is a question of what do we lead with. Often in our work with the people in our seminars we say, "Oh you want to do this, this and this, but what do you want to lead with.

It is the same here. What do we want to lead with. I am suggesting that now is the time that we want to lead or we might want to lead with the Spirit..

So where would Jesus be in all of this? It is interesting that Marcus Borg, when he talks about meeting Jesus again for the first time, in his book, the first point is that Jesus was a Spirit person.

What did he mean by that?

He meant that Jesus was a person who had firsthand experiences with the Spiritual dimension of life. They were transforming to him and he shared them. He was a mediator of the Spirit.

Borg goes on to say something that could shake us all up. He says that Jesus was one of many spirit people in his day and one of many mediators.

This does not take away from Jesus for me. It brings Jesus alive. Carl Jung called Jesus a religious pioneer. Years ago Lois, when we were identifying gifts, called me a pioneer so I identified when Jung said Jesus was a pioneer. I thought "Hey, yeah, I can groove on that." But what did he mean? He meant that Jesus listened to the call of the spirit and had the guts to go with it.

The call to follow Jesus, according to Jung, is to be a religious pioneer to do the same thing. Not to play follow the leader, but to get in touch with our unique calling and our unique take on the culture.

As I try to do this, I look about at the culture of Washington and see we have many poor people and we have much struggle, but what I see are people who are hungry for the spirit, but do not have a place to go. They have tried churches and they have not been very helpful to them.

I see people who want the spiritual dimension in their lives, but they do not know how to get it. They are willing to try many things.

When I look around the congregation here, I see people who represent many paths to spiritual aliveness that are door openers for people. Creativity. In opening that up to people is a dynamite way . Muriel, the body stuff and Sherry and Sue, the body stuff is a great door opener.

So I would love a group that lifts all this up for other people.

In 1983 Sonya and I went to a world assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver. We had a great time there.

Every assembly of the World Council has a theme that they wrestle over a great deal. The theme for ours was, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

The host country always puts on big bash for everybody. The Canadians were celebrating their indigenous culture and had many displays, exhibits and teachings and rituals you could partake in. It was terrifically motivating to get in touch with them.

All this did not quite go together for me with the theme, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. That theme seemed to be a little bit dogmatic for me. It is interesting that seven years later, in Cambra, the next world assembly had a different theme all together. It was, Come, Holy Spirit. Renew the whole creation.

That theme packed a wallop for me. I thought, Wow, that represents so much movement.

First they weren't talking about Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. They were talking about the whole of creation. That makes so much sense to all of us. They were not talking just about Jesus. They were talking about the Spirit that infuses all of us. And they were not proclaiming. They were praying. They were asking for wisdom.

I thought that that was a beautiful stance. That is the stance I would like to be in.

I have led people in this prayer a lot. "Come, Holy Spirit. Renew the whole creation." It is a very easy prayer to pray. I would like to invite you to pray it.

It often is done with body movement so I would like to ask you to stand and raise your hands, signifying "Come Holy Spirit"

and then come down, hand on heart, "renew me from within."
Then extend your arms to every one in the room.

Let's do it three times.