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John 1:1-18
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IS GOD EVIDENT?

If someone were to tell you this morning that this beautiful and dignified colonial building in which we meet was not the consequence of long and arduous labor on the part of architects, planners, builders with a wide variety of skills and trades and hundreds of men and women who provided the economic means by which all the others were able to pool their abilities in a common cause, but rather that this church building had just miraculously appeared one morning out of nowhere with no human being having done a single thing to make it possible, you would be convinced that the person arguing such a possibility had suddenly taken leave of his senses and required the services of a psychiatrist at the earliest possible moment.

If I were to insist today that this great organ behind me with its hundreds of pipes, its carefully measured and sensitively tuned mechanism with all of its hundreds of electrical connections and which cost well over \$50,000, just mysteriously appeared a few years ago as the result of a blind cosmic accident of some kind, you would laugh me out of the church--and rightfully so.

If I were to tell you that this watch which I wear and which not only tells the time but contains an alarm which I can set for any hour, is not the product of many hours of skilled labor by well-trained craftsmen who take years to learn their trade, but is just an accidental co-location of atoms which, through happenstance and good fortune, managed to fall together into a certain intricate pattern when a small handful of metallic splinters were tossed into the air, you would, politely, I am sure, either call me a liar or be convinced I had suddenly bid farewell to all my higher mental faculties.

There can hardly be anyone present in this place this morning who would deny that the universe of which you and I are a tiny, infinitesimal part, but a part so complicated and complex no one of us can understand it all--is at the very least a million times more complicated and complex than this church building, the organ, my watch, or my physical body. Yet one frequently runs up against people who say they don't know whether or not there is a Creator of this vast and mysterious universe, or whether it just happened, is just a freak cosmic accident. And one occasionally confronts the dogmatist who absolutely knows that there is no rational, purposeful mind behind it all. When I hear that, I say to myself, "How can anyone believe that? How can he believe such a proposition for which there is absolutely no evidence?"

Is God Evident? - page 2

Is God evident? If He is not evident in what He has created, then either He is not evident at all, or else we human creatures are blind to the evidence that stares us in the face twenty-four hours a day.

I take a walk in the woods on a beautiful spring day where a few weeks before everything was frozen, and, at least to the human eye, completely dead and inert. But look now! The hepatica, the marsh marigolds, the violets appear again as they have regularly been appearing for hundreds of centuries. The beautiful buds of the shagbark hickory are about to burst open into those lovely, soft, green leaves. The orioles and the red breasted grosbeaks suddenly reappear. Soon there will be eggs in the nest the robin has built in the cedar and in the towhee's nest under the awning. There will be life! life! life! everywhere and apparently coming from nowhere. My mind and my spirit rejoice and I repeat again those beautiful 2,000 year old words of King Solomon:

"For lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds has come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in the land."

Then I meet someone who tries to tell me that God is not evident. If He exists, they exclaim, why doesn't He make Himself known? Could it possibly be because none are so blind as those who will not see? God may not be evident to you, but He is certainly evident to me. I don't need a scientist, or a philosopher or a theologian to demonstrate His existence. I don't have to search for God; I can find no place where He is not obviously proclaiming His presence and His glory.

There are those, and I know many, who echo the cry of the Psalmist, "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." And is not that very cry a demonstration that God is--that there is someone to cry out to, and someone who will answer our pathetic human cries?

God is evident! He is evident in nature. He is evident in history--the history of the race and the history of the individual. It is not God who needs to make Himself evident; it is we who need to become aware of the Evident. But we fill our minds and our lives full of garbage which effectually blinds us to the reality of our environment and then cry out, "Where is God?" He is right here, right now. Hear and heed these words of William Blake, for they are everlastingly true:

"If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, until he sees all things through the narrow chinks of his cavern."

II

Have you never thought it significant that nowhere in the entire Biblical record is there any argument for the existence of God? There is plenty of argument about His nature, His will and attributes, but not one word about whether or not He exists. Nothing!

Just as Jesus never discussed the existence of God, is never recorded as having argued with an atheist or an agnostic, neither do I, nor will I, engage in such an argument with anyone. I just extend my pity and my compassion. I am sorry for such a person. He has no comfort in time of sorrow, no strength in time of weakness, no solace in time of loss.

An old legend tells of a Portuguese monastery on top of a 300-foot cliff. No access was available save in a basket pulled to the top by a rope. As one visitor one day got into the basket he asked, "How often do you change the rope?" He got the calm reply, "Whenever the old one breaks."

The atheist and the agnostic go through life sustained by a perilously weak and ragged rope which may break at any moment. Someone put it a bit differently but just as accurately, "An atheist is a person who has no invisible means of support."

Maybe it all depends on one's point of view. Maybe we see what we want to see, believe what we want to believe. But as for me, it is not a matter of searching for God; I have found Him. I see Him everywhere, in everything. And if He's real to me merely because I want Him to be real, then I thank God that this is what I do want and this is what I can see. If I am the victim of a grand delusion, then praise God for that delusion. I am confident that I can live a grand and glorious life in my delusion--if that is indeed what it is--but what kind of life can an atheist or an agnostic live with his delusion? If you have your choice of delusions which one do you pick?

I see what God has done for others and I know that He is. I know what God has done for me and I shall believe in Him forever. "Is God evident?" is a question no man can answer for another, but He is evident to me.

III

But now we must face a much more important question. In religion it is always the most important question. If God is evident to me, what evidence is there in my life and conduct that makes evident to others my conviction? What difference does God make?

And you see, here we come right back to where we left off last Sunday. Last week's sermon concluded with congregational applause. It was a great experience, wasn't it? I assume the applause was due to the congregation's agreement with what was said

and with the enthusiasm with which it was urged that we ought all to become excited about our religious faith.

But all week long I've been a bit concerned with whether or not the applause and the enthusiasm which was displayed here last Sunday was offered for the right reason. We can applaud people, we can applaud ideas, we can demonstrate our agreement. But the acid test of last Sunday's service is this: What were the consequences? Was anything changed for more than a moment? How many went out of this place last Sunday and did a good deed they might not otherwise have done? How many were inspired to join the choir, teach in the church school, double their contributions to worthy causes? If all that happened last Sunday was that we all left here with a nice, warm feeling which lasted a couple of hours, the service and the sermon were a failure.

What we should really be excited about is God; His love, His presence, His will. What we should be enthusiastic about is the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and our own Christian discipleship. What we should have a great concern for is how each of us can help make this fellowship more meaningful and helpful to every person who has contact with it. Here, in this place, for us, ought to be the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth. Here in this place, God ought to be more evident and more real than anywhere else. This place should be a spiritual factory for the production of Christian saints!

If God is evident to us, then He should be the motivation and the inspiration that urges each one of us to higher goals and more noble aspirations. If God is evident to us, then each one of us ought to echo and live the words of George Eliot:

O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence;
Live, in pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, In scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence, urge man's search
To vaster issues.

Amen.