

April 2023



From the VEEP

“Why doesn’t God speak to us through angels anymore?” Although I have had to start participating asynchronously due to a temporary scheduling conflict, I have been enjoying the synod wide Acts bible study. Reading the texts and listening to the discussion has deepened my understanding and been spiritually enlightening. Many questions are raised that give me food for thought. During one of the sessions in February, one of the participants wondered why we no longer have angelic visitations. Throughout the book of Acts there are twenty-one references to angels, so we wondered, why doesn't God speak to us the way he spoke to the people in the Bible? Where are our burning bushes, visions, angels, and prophetic dreams? Why don't we have those experiences now?

Well, maybe we just no longer have eyes to see or ears to hear when God's messengers come to us. Maybe today, in our very practical analytical manner, we dismiss the dreams we have as just mere nonsense. Living as we do in an age of reason, we want to believe that we can understand everything by a simple application of our senses to the physical world. So, our dreams, we believe, are our brains sending neurons to make sense out of the stimuli we have every day. Dreams don't come from outside us, we think, rather they are the creation of our own minds.

Or perhaps we are just out of tune with God – not on God’s wavelength. Maybe we aren't tuned in to God’s frequency. Maybe we need to readjust our settings so that the signals that God is sending out are capable of being read and interpreted by us. Theologian Leonard Sweet refers to Jesus as a “divine tuning fork to the eternal.” Maybe we need to recalibrate through Jesus and get back in tune with God.

Recently, I had the pleasure of listening to a lay preacher reflecting on Mark 9:7 - “This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him.” She traced back through our scriptural history the ways in which God has spoken and we have been called to listen. She shared a time in her life when she felt that she had received a very clear message from God, but it wasn't from an angel or through a dream, rather it came in writing through a verse-a-day calendar that she had received from her mother long before she needed it. There were three different incidents that she described where she had a very significant problem and concern and went to the calendar and looked up the message for that date and it spoke directly to her problem or concern.

I think I have mentioned in a previous article how I have felt God communicating with me when it came to my calling as a teacher. God spoke to me through “coincidences.” For example, during a time when I wasn’t a regular church attendee, I felt pulled to attend on a particular Sunday and it turned out to be World Education Sunday. That was followed up with various friends and acquaintances suddenly regaling me with accounts of their experiences as teachers. Later, the message came through scripture when I was avoiding returning to teaching after a leave of absence and, as the lector, I was called to read from Isaiah 50: “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher.”

Were these experiences burning bushes or descending doves? No. Were they God speaking through calendars and friendships and scripture? I believe so. And because I believe, I will keep listening, watching, and seeking to tune in to God’s frequency. May you also hear God’s amazing messages to you this Eastertide.

Here's what the Synod Council and/or I have been up to in March:

I continue to attend the Synod-wide Acts Bible Study (though recently by watching the recordings). I’m looking forward to upcoming classes and the Spirit Stirring and Creation Care retreat coming up on April 1 at First Lutheran in Bothell. Synod Council met on March 18. Among other agenda items, we reviewed updates to our personnel and finance policies.

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From the Bishop:

I recently learned that the largest glacier between Mt. Rainier and Glacier Peak is no more. The reporter actually said that the glacier had died. Died. Gone. For thousands of years, the Hinman Glacier lived in the Washington Cascades providing much needed water to the Skykomish River. It is now gone.

A few months ago, my beloved dog, Gracie, died. She was thirteen. She was sick. It was time. But Gracie was with me through my cancer treatment, my children leaving home, my marriage ending, moving to a new city, beginning a new job, being in a new relationship ... and now she has died. She is now gone.

In this synod we recently had two churches close: Clearbrook Lutheran Church in Lynden and Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Concrete. There are additional congregations who are discerning closure in this synod. All these congregations thrived in their communities for many years. Baptisms, weddings, funerals happened. People heard, shared, and lived into the good news of Jesus. And now these congregations have either decided, or are discerning, if their time lifecycle has come to an end.

All of these deaths are hard. They hurt my heart. There is grief and there is pain. And, while I might not know what you are grieving, I am sure that there is heartache in your life, too. Sometimes it seems that there is so much death. And sometimes it seems overwhelming.

As Christians we might say, "But I thought we were promised immortality. I thought "death has lost its sting." Truthfully, it doesn't feel that way. Death is real. It hurts. Where is this resurrection and new life we are promised?"

Dr. Brian Bantum, professor and author, writes regarding human immortality:

Our personhood, the body we speak of so confidently that was meant to live forever, is itself an arrangement of cells and tissues that are cycling through life and death. Our bodies are constantly undergoing changes, small transformations in our gradual development from infant to adult. Our bodies are no different and are connected to the cycles of life and death that are intrinsic to creation's goodness. As Indigenous theologian Randy Woodley reminds us, 'Death is simply another part of living.' (*Christian Century, Did God intend for Adam and Eve to live forever?, March 12, 2023*)

On Ash Wednesday this year, I had a vision of God playing in the dirt. Kneeling down, mixing dirt into mud, molding and mixing, and forming each human. God – laughing and creating. God – loving and generating. I smiled at this sight. Later in the service, when I went forward to receive ashes in the shape of a cross upon my forehead, when I heard, "Dust to dust and ashes to ashes," I had a vision of God scooping each beloved human into God's arms at the end of their life. Holding the human turned dirt again. Loving and creating even more.

Dr. Bantum writes later in the same article, "Change, transformation, death, cycles of renewal and cessation—these are all part of God's creation. And this change is beautiful and good." Is it possible to move beyond the grief we feel when something ends and see the new life that might be coming?

Perhaps the glacier that died could be an impetus for us to take seriously the threat of climate change. I would hope so. I hope that the love my dog Gracie had for me will make me more loving towards others. In our synod, we are working with the closing congregations so that together we may begin new ministries and new ways of being church in this new day and age.

During this season of Lent – and into Holy Week and Easter – we know the truth of death. We know it in our bones. We acknowledge the pain, the difficulty, the fear, and the grief that comes with death. And yet, even more so, as people of faith, as people who celebrate Easter, we trust in God's love through Jesus Christ who died and rose again for us and for the redemption of this entire world. Yes. There is death. And yes. There is resurrection.

God continues to play in the soil. God continues to create and nurture new life. God continues to hold and sustain life. And, fundamentally, without question, God brings life from death - each and every day.

May you have a blessed Easter. May we together, in this real world that we live in, trust in Jesus. And may we, with all the angels, archangels and all the saints, shout the good news together, "Happy Easter! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!"

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