

1

“There’s the Big Dipper,” I said one night while looking at the stars. “It’s one of the easiest constellations to find in the night sky. It kind of looks like a bowl with a handle on it.”

“I see it!” my young star observer excitedly proclaimed after searching the night sky.

“If you follow the two stars in the bowl of the dipper,” I explained, “they lead to the North Star in the Little Dipper.”

“I see it! I see it! But the Little Dipper is harder to see than the Big Dipper.”

I then explained something about the Big Dipper that was even harder to see. “If you look very closely at the middle star of the Big Dipper’s handle, you might see that it’s actually two stars, named Mizar and Alcor. They’re called a double star. They’re not actually next to one another, for Alcor is farther away, but to us they look as though they are beside each other.”

My younger observed squinted his eyes and replied, “Well, maybe I see it. I’m not sure.”

“Mizar is also a double star, so with a telescope one can actually see another star, so altogether there are three stars in the middle of the handle.”

“I can’t see that,” replied my star friend. “I need to see it to believe it.”

We set up my telescope, and I aimed it at the stars in the Dipper’s handle. Once I had it focused on the set of double stars, my young observer looked into the telescope eyepiece and proclaimed, “I see it! I see it! I believe it now.”

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to see something in order to believe it?

Maybe you’ve received one of those emails or letters in the mail that says, “You’ve just won lots of money.” Right. I’ll believe it when I see it.

Or maybe someone who has been abusive says, “I promise I will change.” You might reply, “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

A person struggling with a life issue might hear someone say, “Jesus knows your troubles and cares for you,” to which the person might reply, “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

2

In the midst of a life crisis, some may find it difficult to trust that God is real, for it's hard to believe in someone we can't see.

It appears the early church struggled with the same issue, for after John had written his Gospel about the stories of Jesus, we have three later letters written to the church about practical matters. In the beginning of 1 John, the author writes that he had heard from Jesus firsthand, that he and others had seen with their own eyes, that they had touched with their own hands. In turn, they wanted to reassure others about their experiences by declaring what they had seen and heard so others could trust in the news as well.

Some in the early church, decades after Jesus had died, might have been muttering, "I didn't see Jesus. That was before my time. How can I believe? I'd like to see in order to believe."

It's a bit like the young girl who woke up in the middle of the night during a thunderstorm. The lightning was flashing, lighting up her room with each bolt. The thunder shook the house,

with windows rattling. She jumped out of bed and ran into the room of her parents.

As she hopped into their bed, she cried, "The storm scares me. Can I sleep here tonight?"

Her dad replied, "You'll be ok. No matter where you are, God is with you and will always watch over you."<sup>1</sup>

She replied, "I already know that, but right now I need someone with skin on."

I imagine we've each had those times when we need someone with skin on, when we need a tangible reassurance of God's presence.

Maybe we've heard the stories about Jesus. We've attended worship for countless years. We've said lots of prayers. But when a crisis hits, we need a hand to hold. Someone to listen to us. A gentle hug. Someone with skin on.

The letter of 1 John strives to make Jesus more real, to remind the church to offer a reassuring hug to those struggling with the challenges of their lives. While the Gospel of John emphasizes Jesus' divine nature by speaking about his relationship with God, this letter of 1 John emphasizes Jesus' human nature, his relationship with us.

3

Over the next several weeks as we read part of this letter, we'll hear the author's encouragement not only for those in the church, but also a reminder for the church to reflect God's love to those around us. You see, we are the skin and arms and hands and feet of Jesus. Those of us in the church help embody God's presence among us, just as Jesus embodied God's presence 2000 years ago.

"Wait a minute, Pastor. You're telling me I'm like Jesus? That through me people experience God? That sounds a bit heavy, a bit too much. I'm not divine like Jesus. I'm just human."

I don't mean to say that we're anywhere close to what Jesus was like, but I do think each of us contains a bit of God within us. The Quakers, also known as Friends, often speak of the Inner Light, the divine spark that lies within us. An early Quaker, Rufus Jones, wrote in 1904: "The Inner Light is the doctrine that there is something Divine, 'Something of God' in the human soul."<sup>2</sup>

The Bible begins in Genesis with God creating humans in God's image, with God's likeness, to be

like God. There's a part of you and me that is like God, a light that reflects who God is.

I know that seems like an awesome and overwhelming responsibility, and we may feel inadequate for the task. We may not even realize we are reflecting God's light, as was the case when one church member wrote about a conversation with another member:

I had an interesting conversation with a woman I greatly respect. She told me of the work she does serving on teams, committees, boards, and coalitions. She explained how they research social crises, create agendas and policies, and work behind the scenes to effect change. I told her I was perplexed that anyone would actually enjoy going to meeting after meeting after meeting! I would rather spend hours cooking for large crowds, creating tasty masterpieces, and watching the faces of hungry people as they share what I've prepared. She told me she can't imagine standing on her feet all day and having to engage face-to-face with people in need. We decided it's a wonderful thing that God has created people like her who like to plan and think, and people like me who like to create and

④

do. Together, people like us can engage our bodies, minds, and spirits to change the world.<sup>3</sup>

Some of you here this morning enjoy having meetings, but I know others who would rather avoid them. Some enjoy working outside to keep our lawn and property looking good, while others would rather be inside preparing meals. Some prefer to count money, while others would rather teach children or adults about the Bible. Some prepare communion, while others clean up afterwards. Maybe you prefer sending cards or visiting a homebound member. Others like to tie blankets [purchase blankets] to provide a warm hug to someone in need.

All these activities help “put skin on,” help shine our inner light that reflects God’s light. Those who see us in the church look for a reflection of hope,

for someone to trust, as a young woman discovered while:

she was soaking up the sun’s rays on a Florida beach when a little boy in his swimming trunks, carrying a towel, came up to her and asked her, “Do you believe in God?”

She was surprised by the question but replied, “Why, yes, I do.”

Then he asked her, “Do you go to church every Sunday?”

Again, her answer was “Yes!”

Then he asked, “Do you read your Bible and pray every day?”

Again she said, “Yes!” But by now her curiosity was very much aroused. At last the boy sighed and said with obvious relief, “Will you hold my quarter while I go in swimming?”<sup>4</sup>

Be the light. Be the one with skin on to trust to hold the quarter. Help others see it to believe it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, adapted.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, Rufus (1904). *Social Law in the Spiritual World: Studies in Human and Divine Inter-Relationship*. p. 167-168, as quoted at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inward\\_light](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inward_light).

<sup>3</sup> Narrative Lectionary Summer 2018 Worship Resources Copyright © 2018 Clergy Stuff, p. 36.

---

<sup>4</sup> Hodgkin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 3008-3014). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #437.