

“Spirit Guide”  
2 Corinthians 3:1-6; 4:5-6  
February 14, 2021  
Rev. David Hutchinson

Images of a woman named Bessie are etched deep on my memory.

It has been decades since I saw her and I’m sure she died decades ago.

She was a figure from my childhood world...

And so I remember her somewhat mythically.

But her impact on my way of seeing the world was significant.

Bessie was not able to see with her eyes, but she found other ways to see.

She was a resident in the nursing home where my parents worked.

As a boy of about 10 or 12 - - I would and sit at the front desk and talk to her while waiting for my parents to do whatever it was they were doing - - and drive me home. / Her voice is etched in my memory because for years she answered the phone at the nursing home. Sometimes I would call in from somewhere and if she was answering the phone I’d ask about my parents to see if they had left for home yet - - and she would tell me.

She had wanted to do something productive to help out. / As one of the younger residents she was otherwise functional except for her blindness - - which in those days was reason for her family to have placed her there to live. / Some people had said she couldn’t answer the phone at the desk - - because there were several phone lines - - and how could she see the lights that lit up - - indicating which line was in use. / In those days phones with three or four lines had a row of square buttons under the number dial each of which lit up. / There were 4 clear lighted buttons for the 4 phone lines - - and then a red one for hold.

My dad had found someone like Roger Liefeld - - to rig up a device to fit over the lights that would beep whenever the light was lit. / She moved the device from light to light and when it beeped she knew it was lit up.

So the obstacle to answering the phone was not her physical blindness - - but rather the limited insight of others around her - - and the expected limitations and reduced expectations of others. / Who is to say - - what someone might do or not do?

I thought of Bessie when reading from Paul's second letter to Corinth.

Paul describes Christ as - - light.

According to Paul - - Jesus Christ is a light - - that shines in our hearts.

That's in chapter 4.

And notice Paul says that people who don't believe are blinded in their MINDS.

But believers SEE - - because of the light shining in our HEARTS.

Light to show us the way...

Just before that - - in chapter 3 Paul says that the Holy Spirit is written on our hearts.

So the Spirit - - or the light of Christ - - guides believers.

Our Spirit guide - - shows the way.

But sometimes - - for some people - - their minds keep them from seeing the way.

Because of what they think they know.

According to Paul true knowledge is - - of God - - and we know it in our hearts.

Have you ever felt like you were a little bit in the dark?

Have you ever wanted to know which way to go in life?

Have you ever wanted to see and understand life more fully?

According to Paul - - there is a way.

The way - - according to Paul - - is the light of Christ.

The light of Christ shines.

Look at the face of Christ.

Pray and contemplate the life of Christ.

The way to a fuller and more faithful life is not some new piece of knowledge.

The way is Christ - - who suffered - - and loved.

Christ - - whose face shines.

If we open our hearts - - Christ will shine in them.

And if Christ shines in our hearts - - we will see the way more clearly.

That's what Paul says.

I believe my old friend Bessie would know what Paul was talking about. / And I believe she might even have been able to see the light he was talking about. / The light that shines in our hearts...

C. S. Lewis once wrote about how faith is like a light that helps us see. / His words help me understand what Paul is saying more clearly. / Lewis wrote, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen - - not only because I SEE it - - but because BY IT I see everything else". / Reflecting on this, Oxford professor Alister McGrath has said, "Once the Christian worldview has been accepted... it leads to a "special sort of imaginative enjoyment" and - - beliefs when TRUSTED - - allow us to admire divine reality. / We see everything in light of our vision of God. / Believing in God - - is a way to see the world!

So if these two theologians are correct - - believing in God - - is our Spirit guide - - and like light in the shadows - - the Spirit of Christ - - shows us the way forward.

Have you ever felt like you were a little bit in the dark?

Have you ever wanted to know which way to go in life?

Have you ever wanted to see and understand life more fully?

Christ is the way... / Not some idea or concept or technique.

According to Paul - - Christ will light the way for us.

Look to the life of Christ.

Let your heart - - see - - the face of Christ.

Pray and contemplate and consider - - who Christ is:

Christ is the one who suffered and died and rose.

And Christ will guide you home.

When I thought more about what it might be like to be guided in this way - - I thought of homing pigeons - - who just know which way to go instinctually. / There is a story about pigeons in Africa - - written by Jane and Chris Kurtz - - who some of you may know. / Their parents Polly and Harold were mission workers in Ethiopia with the Presbyterian Church - - and they lived in Portland. / Jane and Chris wrote a book called: "Only a Pigeon".

The book take place in Ethiopia, which they describe as "...a land of ancient churches and castles, of mountains and waterfalls." / They begin with the image of the sunrise, "The sun rises over the city of Addis Ababa, over the palaces of former kings - - - the sun rises over beautiful houses of stone and brick - - and over small houses where the children own almost nothing, sometimes only a pigeon."

Early one morning the game begins. One boy holds his pigeon upward. Then another.

If one boy's pigeon follows another one to his home he loses his bird.

If the other boy's bird follows his he will feed it and make it feel at home.

But what if the other boy's bird has coaxed away his own?

If the bird does not return, the boy's bird will never see his cage again.

After the game is over everyone goes home, happy if their birds are home too.

Night in Ethiopia can be cold. / The boy remembers mongoose tracks and sits near the cage watching with a pile of rocks to throw if anything threatens his birds. / Tiredness tugs - - but he shakes it off as long as he can. / At first light - - the boy is already standing by the cage.

For one more day the birds are safe.

Some may say it is only a pigeon.

But his HEART says - - it is something proud and beautiful.

It is something that kisses the sky.

Have you ever wanted to know which way to go in life?

Have you ever wanted to see and understand life more fully?

According to Paul - - there is a way.

The way - - according to Paul - - is the light of Christ.

And the light of Christ - - the Spirit in our hearts - - will guide us.

If we look to that light - - we will be guided - - home - - like homing pigeons.

This Sunday in our liturgical tradition - - is the day we celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ - - it is the transition from the season of Epiphany to the season of Lent. / The Epiphany light - - gives way to Lenten contemplation - - as the sunlight begins to return to earth and remind us of springtime to come.

The transfiguration of Christ is a strange event on a mountaintop that is described in three of the four gospels. / Jesus face glows and disciples are afraid. / But maybe for people who feel lost in the dark, or who long for clarity about which way to go in life - - there is less to be afraid of than we think. / Maybe if you're scared enough - - what's scary - - changes.

In this particular year, and on this Sunday, I feel more open to the mystery.

I long to see clearly. / I hope for a Spirit to guide me - - that I can trust.

Maybe this is a good year to understand the transfiguration better.

And maybe this passage from Paul can help.

The light that shined in the face of Christ - - also shines in our hearts.

That's what Paul says.

Maybe if we look to our hearts we will discover more than we expected.

Maybe if we close our eyes and pray - -

- - we will see more clearly than we imagined we could.

With that thought on our hearts, I'll end today with some lines from the poet John Keats.

This is from the poem called "As from the Darkening Gloom"

It was written on the occasion of the DEATH of Keats's grandmother...

"As from the darkening gloom - - a silver dove - -

up-soars - - and darts - - into the Eastern light...

on pinions that naught moves - - but - - pure delight...

So fled - - my SOUL - - into the realms above...

regions of peace and everlasting love...

where happy Spirits - - (are) crowned with circles bright."

And so until that time when we all arrive in heaven...

Until we can either confirm - - or expand - - or revise Keats's vision...

Until then - - may we open our hearts to the LIGHT of CHRIST as best we can.

And may that light - - guide our way.