

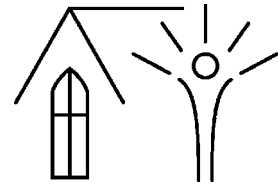


ROSELLE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

206 S. Rush Street
Roselle, IL 60172
(630) 529-1309
www.roselleumc.org

Our Mission Statement:

*“To Know Christ,
To Grow in Christ,
To Show Others Christ”*



January 15, 2006

Sermon – “Obscuring Fog In Our Lives”

John 1: 43-51

Reverend Thomas Kim

Luci Shaw tells of her days living in Washington State; it is an area of natural beauty, surrounded by majestic mountain ranges. This particular area in which Luci Shaw lived was also very foggy, and cloudy much of the time. Sometimes, the fog was so thick it obscured the tops of the mountains. Mt. Baker is an especially beautiful mountain, says Shaw, but it is usually hidden from view. Shaw had to remind herself that at all times she was surrounded by the beauty and majesty of the mountains, even when she couldn't see them. And occasionally, a wind would blow through the area and push the fog away, and then Mt. Baker would be revealed in all its glory. (Stories for the Christian Year, 1992, pp. 40-41)

That is our theme for today's message. There is an obscuring fog in our lives as well, and the obscuring fog hinders our vision, thoughts, understanding of others, and the beauty and majesty of the world.

Let us take a look at today's Gospel lesson. Jesus went to Galilee and found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip went to Nathanael, and said to him that he believed that he had found the promised Messiah whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote about, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth. Do you know what Nathanael's response was? It was **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”**

Without understanding the background, we can not understand the full story here. Jesus was son of Joseph who was a carpenter. It indicates that Jesus was not from an affluent or high class family. Jesus was a mere common young man not from a special family or an educated man.

Also, Philip said, “Jesus is from Nazareth.” Nazareth the place in which Jesus grew up was an insignificant village in Galilee, and it is not mentioned in the Old Testament. Jesus from Nazareth is held up to scorn by those skeptical of his mission.

Therefore, Nathanael questioned the qualification of Jesus as the Messiah wasn't surprising. He challenged Philip, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

The truth is whether we are good or not, it is easy to have a bias, preconceived notion or opinion, and that's not an illusion, but a reality. Certainly we are not free from this kind of sin.

So we keep saying the same question Nathanael asked, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” The question of doubt, the question of prejudice is nothing new. It has been around since the dawn of time. Yet we see the world through the filter of prejudice; racism, sexism, nationalism, ageism, and religion. We just change a word and keep asking;

“Can anything good come from women?”

“Can anything good come from African Americans?”

“Can anything good come from Asians?”

“Can anything good come from Muslims?”

“Can anything good come from Hispanics?”

It goes on, and on.

There is an obscuring fog in our lives. We need a wind to push away the obscuring fog from our eyes.

Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor in America, started her practice in New York in 1851. Not only was she unable to find patients -- no one would even rent her a room, once she mentioned that she was a doctor. After weeks of trudging the streets, she finally rented rooms from a landlady who asked no questions about what Elizabeth planned to do with them.

Quaker women, who had always been receptive to the goal of equal rights, became Elizabeth's first patients. But no hospitals would allow her on its staff. Finally, with financial help from her Quaker friends, she opened her own clinic in one of New York's worst slums in March, 1853. Yet, for the first few weeks, no one showed up. Then one day a woman in such agony that she didn't care who treated her, staggered up the steps and collapsed in Elizabeth's arms.

When the woman was treated and recovered, she told all her friends about the wonderful woman doctor in downtown New York. The dispensary was soon doing well. It eventually expanded, moved, and is now a branch of the New York Infirmary on East Fifteenth Street. (Bits & Pieces, August 22, 1991)

Let me ask you, “Can anything good come from women?” Yes, indeed! Is the fog of sexism in our society and church history now? The obscuring fog should be pushed away to see the truth.

Can anything good come from Nazareth? We have tendency to judge people by appearance. The obscuring fog should be pushed away from our eyes to see the beauty and majesty of truth.

*During his college years, Vernon E. Jordan, lawyer and former advisor to President Clinton, worked as a chauffeur for a prominent Southern banker, Robert F. Maddox. Jordan drove Maddox around in the mornings, then served him dinner in the evenings. In the afternoons when Maddox napped, Jordan often slipped into his library and read great works. One afternoon, Maddox came upon Jordan reading in his library. He was astounded that his black chauffeur could read. And he was surprised even more when he learned that Jordan was attending college, studying to be a lawyer. “Black people aren’t supposed to be lawyers,” Maddox said. (Great Expectations by Vernon Jordan, Jr. with Annette Gordon-Reed, *Reader’s Digest*, Jan. 2002, pp 91-95)*

The same old statement. Can anything good come from Nazareth? Can anything good come from Americans? Yes, indeed! The sad part of the story is that such a comment is not history yet!

Do you think Mr. Maddox was a bad person? Not necessarily. But because of the obscuring fog of racism, Maddox could not see the potential and ability in Jordan.

What is the obscuring fog in your life? The fog of racism should be pushed away from our eyes to see the beauty and majesty of a person who was created by God, and who is God’s divine work.

Do you remember when Governor Bill Clinton announced that he would run for the President of America? Did not we hear the same kind of question? “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” A governor from Arkansas was a joke to many. Why? Because of the tenacious nature of prejudice. Prejudice leads people to discrimination, makes people blind emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. So a presidential candidate was ignored, and the Messiah Jesus was discriminated by people. The Christ Jesus was not recognized.

How often we judge others people and are judged with very little, and even without experiencing them at all.

The problem of an obscuring fog of misunderstanding exists not only in our society, but also in our church which church does not want to see.

Wes Seliger is an unconventional Episcopal clergyman who loves motorcycles. He tells about being in a motorcycle shop one day, drooling over a huge Honda 750 and wishing that he could buy it. A salesman came over and began to talk about his product. He talked about speed, acceleration, excitement, the attention-getting growl of the pipes, racing, risk. He talked about how the good-looking girls would be attracted to anyone riding on such a cycle.

The he discovered that Wes was a minister. It always happens, doesn't it? Immediately the salesman changed his language and even the tone of his voice. He spoke quietly and talked about good mileage and visibility. It was indeed a "practical" vehicle.

Wes observed: "Lawnmower salespersons are not surprised to find clergypersons looking at their merchandise; other cycle salespersons are. Why? Does this tell us something about clergypersons and about church? Lawnmowers are slow, safe, sane, practical, and middle-class. Motorcycles are fast, dangerous, wild, thrilling." Then Wes asks a question: "Is being a Christian more like mowing a lawn or like riding a motorcycle? Is the Christian life safe and sound, or dangerous and exciting?" He concludes, "Our task is to take the church out on the open road, give it the gas, and see what the old baby will do!"

Our job as a church is not to stay in a comfort zone, but to say "CAN WE DO ANYTHING NEW AND EXCITING?"

We have to push away the obscuring fog of prejudice and doubt in our lives, and we must not judge people by appearance, race, color of skin, sex, or age. We all are created in God's Divine image, and children of God. When I say "WE," it does not mean only "Americans," but also all the people on earth.

Our call is to respond to Christ to blow the various thick fogs of prejudice or bias. Our call is to be a wind to blow an obscuring fog in our lives like Philip to Nathanael, the Quaker women for Elizabeth Blackwell, and Vernon Jordan to Maddox and many. They were winds to blow the fog of prejudice away.

There is beauty and majesty beyond an obscuring fog. As we blow an obscuring fog, we can see the beauty and the majesty of truth. Jesus says this way to Nathaniel, "You will see greater things than these... You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (vvs. 50-51) Do you want to see beyond an obscuring fog? You will see heaven opened. This is an offer we must not refuse. Praise God and Amen.