

26 September 2010, St. Matthew's Day

I remember clearly when I first started seeking God (When I first became reflective). I did not know at the time that God was what I was seeking and I know now that the experience was really one of God seeking me. But regardless, the memory is clear.

It was 1944-45, near the end of WWII and we lived in the suburbs of Oklahoma City. I was in the first and second grade. There were 5 or 6 neighborhood children near my age and in the summer we would play outside all day long. We would have long pretend games. It would start with one of us saying "Let's pretend...". We were Marines storming Japanese held Pacific islands (the girls of course were all nurses). Or, being in Oklahoma we played cowboys and Indians (I don't have to tell you that we were the cowboys and cowgirls.) I also have vivid memories of us all singing the popular songs from Rogers and Hammerstein's musical *Oklahoma* which had just opened in 1943.

Eventually we would be called to dinner but would eat as fast as we could and be right back outside resuming play until well after dark...it was a safer world then. I remember in the summer laying on the grass lawn and looking up at the crystal clear sky as the stars came out and wondering...wondering: How many stars are there and how far away are they? And when you get to the end of the sky what was beyond that? How could there be anything beyond the end? And, have they always existed? If not what was before that? Was there a time before time? How could there be no time. When will it end and what will exist then? At a tender age I was exploring the space-time continuum. *We just installed Sunday School teachers...is there any more sacred responsibility than helping young people become spiritually aware?....children are as spiritual as adults!*

I did not know it then but I was asking how did God fit into all of this mystery of creation and the mystery of my "being"? That was more than 65 years ago and I keep asking those same questions.

Two weeks ago, my sermon mentioned Stephen Hawking's latest book which was said by some to question the need for a belief in God as creator of everything that exists. I have finished the book and am happy to announce that I still have no qualms about proclaiming in the Nicene Creed a belief in the God who is "maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and

**unseen**". I will not tell you that I fully understand everything in the book...my last formal study of physics was almost 50 years ago in Adm. Rickover's Nuclear Power School. In fact I am not certain that the authors understand it all but they apparently can do the math; but from what I did understand, my concept of God has become even more mysterious and awesome. In boxing terms, the scientist didn't lay a glove on God as Creator. The young people on Happening weekends use to loudly sing a song that proclaimed "Our God is an awesome God.....". They are right. The nature of the cosmos as unfolded by the physics of Stephen Hawking is open ended beyond my comprehension—it is awesome. It makes it hard to declare impossible that which may be simply incomprehensible! With God all things are indeed possible...remember that in the Creed we acknowledge God of creator of the unseen as well as the seen. Consider dreams and strange messages from God and God's angels. Think of all of the stories of dreams and messages from God that are in the Bible. It would not be much of a story without them. We try to explain them away but dreams and our imaginations and those strange experiences of a sense of God speaking to us are real. Without our dreams and faithful, longing imaginations we might as well be dead...and are spiritually dead!

The Psalmist says that God inhabits the prayers of his people. Perhaps we exist and inhabit God's dream. MLK Jr. had a dream; within our life time much of it has come true. There are theologians who believe that what we know as creation is really just God's dream...I could not prove them wrong and I don't believe Stephen Hawking could either.

I have a dream....I have a dream....about the church and not just the Episcopal Church but the entire church. I have a dream about St. Matthews but I am not talking about that directly....Ruth and I are only interim rectors; St. Matthew's dream must be your dream, not ours, you must formulate and articulate your dream to your search committee and vestry...and then you must work to bring it to life We can only point in directions and say....consider this...consider my dream!

I will tell you my dream for the entire church...you must decide if you share the dream. I start with what is sometimes called "Generous Orthodoxy" which is an affirmation of the historical Christian faith in Jesus Christ as both son of God and man and in his resurrection. It is orthodox in proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior....but it is generous in its understanding of

God's love for all people and all of creation. It is not threatened by allowing that God can find and be found by people through other faiths than just the Christian faith. Generous Orthodox does not feel compelled to defend God. ...Just as God does not need to be defended from science...God after all created science. In the church I dream of, faith in Christ comes from experiences of him in our lives not because of what either the traditions of the church or scripture. In the church I dream of we strive to be followers of Christ rather than believers of propositions (there is a huge difference).

The generous church I dream of is thankful for human intellect and is not threatened by questions and doubts. This church takes very seriously the Jewish "Shema".....Shema means "listen" or "Hear"...shema...listen O Israel, the Lord your God is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your strength, and all of your **mind**". In the Catechism of our church, one of the answers to the question what does it mean to be created in the image of God is *that we are free to make choices and to reason!*

I dream of a church that generously accepts all people; it accepts broken and bent people because it is honest enough to recognize that we are all broken and bent..some just hide it better....but all are accepted: ALL. It is a church where in the midst of our deepest pain and doubts we can just come and weep and not feel ashamed; for we know that others will just hug us and smile and love us.

The church I dream of does not see children as a noisy problem to be solved but as a gift from God who can show us how to joyfully worship God. It does not see our oldest as a problem for whom we have to provide ADA handicapped access but a font of treasured wisdom and experience.

The church I dream of is generous in its understanding of ministry....all people by their baptism are called to ministry. While the ordained have certain functions, authority and decision making is in the hands of all the people. One of the main functions of a priest is to help the people recognize and develop their gifts and call to ministry. This church is more horizontal than vertical...Bishops are more among us than over us.

The generous church is mission oriented. It wants the church to grow in numbers not because larger is better but because it believes that a world increasingly addicted to wealth,

possessions, drugs and sex will never find contentment much less joy without experiencing the love of God. What would it take for you to become so excited about St. Matthew's that you would feel compelled to invite others who have no faith community? Can you dream that? Rather than growing itself, the generous church may choose to just plant other like parishes. The generous church wants to use its abundance to reduce human suffering here and where ever it exists. That is my dream.

What is your dream for St. Matthew's? You must become very clear about that before you call a new Rector. You must take every opportunity...and there will be many opportunities to convey your dream to the Search Committee that we just installed.

Dreams are real, but they need a base, a structure in be based on and to inhabit. Judy Garland got it wrong, it is not "*Somewhere over the rainbow where dreams really do come true*". Dreams become reality in the hard and fast here and now through work, sacrifice, and prayer. In short facilities are needed..Tom Carr now has a presentation to make seeking your thoughts and desires about the facilities that you think will be needed for St. Matthew's to achieve your dream.