

July 5, 2020 | Sanctuary and Journey worship services

TEXT: [Matthew 11:25–30](#)

TITLE: Not So Hidden Wisdom

By the Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

Today we're going to talk about hidden things, revealed things, and wise things. When I was a kid, my parents bought me a subscription to Highlights magazine. One of my favorite pages was the drawing of a tree or a village that contained hidden images of other things—candles, feathers, faces. I would scan the page and discover how the bark actually contained a narrow pencil, or a small sailboat was tucked among the flowers. Preacher Barbara Brown Taylor talks about this type of game as having a spiritual quality to it because it involves looking for the extraordinary hidden within the ordinary. It is like searching for God who is hiding in plain sight.

But the question Taylor doesn't ask is this: Why is God hidden in the first place? Now a pious preacher might reply to that question "God isn't hidden at all! God's love and power and beauty are all around you. You just don't have enough faith to see how God is right in front of your eyes." Great—so now the burden is on me. I'm told that if I work a little harder, if I believe a little stronger then I'll clearly see God. And if that doesn't work, well, it's my fault. I must not be one of the happy, chosen ones who believe without doubts and see God without effort.

That's not very comforting, nor does it seem right. Everyone struggles with faith. Everyone has doubts. I do; you do. Everyone looks around at the world and asks "Where is God?" So let's be scandalous and flip this topic on its head. What if God chooses to be hidden? There is a lot of biblical evidence that suggests this is true. When Moses talked with God on Mount Sinai, God was hidden in a cloud so none could see the Lord. Later God was hidden from view inside the tabernacle of ancient Israel or in the Holy of Holies inner chamber of the temple of Jerusalem. Even when God was made known in Jesus Christ, think about the number of times Jesus did something miraculous and then said to the disciples, "Don't tell others what you've seen." Something about God's nature—and about Christ being the Messiah—is meant to be hidden.

Think of it this way. If you are good at finding things through your own efforts, then God is likely going to be hidden to you. If you can solve your own problems through your brains, your financial resources, your status or connections, then God isn't content to be another tool in your personal toolkit for success. God hides from those good at making it on their own because they have their own ways of doing things; they don't need God because they have their own little "g" gods and ways to succeed. For God's ways are not our ways. God hides yet hopes we will stop depending on our own wisdom. God hopes we will look at the world with different eyes; that we will look closely at the things before us and see a hidden truth, a deeper reality longing to be revealed.

In Matthew 11, Jesus offered a prayer in which he twice used the word "reveal." *I thank you, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the*

intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Lord, for such was your gracious will...[For] no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal [this to]. Hidden things; revealed things—revealed by Christ. I love the bible stories about how Jesus called his first disciples. You’ve heard them since you too were young enough to be reading Highlights magazines. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, spoke to some fishermen there and called them to become fishers of people. In John’s gospel, Jesus was walking near to where John the Baptist was preaching when a couple disciples caught up with him and asked where he was staying. Jesus’ response was “Come and see.” Jesus offered a literal invitation to follow where he led and a spiritual invitation to discover a newness of life that could only be revealed in the act of following. Jesus invited them to learn by doing, to learn by stepping away from old patterns and trusting new ways of living and being in this world.

We are in an exceptional season for our church. It’s impossible to do things the way we’ve always done them. We can’t all gather here in the courtyard for worship praying that our chair remains in the shade and the rainclouds stay away. We can’t walk forward together as a diverse body of believers to share one loaf and one cup as part of the sacrament of communion. We can’t sing hymns together or listen to our choir. We can’t gather for club 116 youth group or Taizé sung prayer on Wednesday evenings. We are doing our best to offer alternatives to the way we used to do church—live-streams, Vacation Church School at home, social media posts. But it’s not the same. It is hard for me and all the staff, and I’m sure it’s difficult for you.

What if we can’t gather in our sanctuary again for six months or more? What if we can’t offer Taizé or Cathedral concerts or group activities until some time in 2021? I don’t know the answer. But on some level, I don’t think I’m supposed to know the answer. God stays hidden when we only try to face challenges with our own resources. Christ calls us from the seashore and says, “Come, follow me. What is hidden will be revealed—and the way forward is most likely not the way you’ve always done things before but a new way. So come and see.”

Hidden things. Revealed things. Wise things. Jesus finished his prayer about things hidden from the intelligent and revealed to spiritual babes, and then he offered another version of his famous call to discipleship. *Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; and you will find rest for your souls.* Two nouns are juxtaposed in these words: rest and yoke. Rest can’t be a synonym for sleep or relaxation, because clearly there is still work to be done. I think the learning that Jesus talks about is not “head” learning but “body” learning—less like a pupil in a classroom and more like an apprentice working alongside a wise teacher. And that fits with the image of a yoke—something that binds two people together so that the learner gains knowledge from the more experienced one. By being yoked to Christ, we move down a different path. We find rest knowing we are finally walking in tandem with God, walking yoked to Christ, and that this path will lead to a wisdom that eases our burdens.

This is our national holiday weekend, but it has been a very unusual 4th of July. Because of the coronavirus, we were told not to gather for parades and fireworks. Most of the country respected this precaution, even if our president didn't. We were advised not to gather in groups of more than 25. Some churches and parishes have felt themselves exempt from this precaution, so we pray for the safety of all who gather in sanctuaries today even as we pray for the safety of any who come into contact with the Covid-19 virus and pray for the over 130,000 families grieving Covid-19 related deaths.

We celebrate the birth of our American nation 244 years ago, even as we are more mindful than ever of the legacy of slavery and racism that goes back more than 400 years and of the work that remains to be done to ensure this land is dedicated to justice for all. This past week numerous members of our staff and congregation took part in an interfaith vigil for Black Lives Matter and reforming our criminal justice and police systems. All these types of protests are faithful witnesses, taking on the yoke of tackling racism and working for equity for all, even if we are not always fully sure what the next steps are.

Gina Raimondo is the governor of Rhode Island, our nation's smallest state. Her bio lists her as being 5'3" tall, but as is common for politicians and sports figures that number is a bit inflated. She is 5' 2". Recently there was a protest near the Rhode Island State House. Police and National Guard had staked out a position of intimidation opposite those demonstrating; both sides waiting to see what would unfold. A curfew had been set for 9:00 pm, but when that hour arrived, the protestors didn't leave. They knelt down for a long moment of silence—8 minutes 46 seconds to honor the memory of George Floyd. Then Gov. Raimondo arrived. She passed through the ranks of helmeted police and entered the front lines of the protestors. Using one of their microphones, she thanked them for coming out, for standing up for what matters, for demanding change. She tried to lead a prayer but the crowd mostly drowned her out. She handed back the mic and turned to leave when a young woman demanded to know if the governor was abandoning them to the helmeted formation before them. She shouted, "You going to stay when they do us?" Raimondo shot back, "Yes, and no one is going to do you!" She did stay. The shields and plastic bullets and the flawed belief that force is the cure when injustice is the disease did not win that day. Raimondo didn't make promises to satisfy the protestors' many demands, but she stayed with them. She yoked herself with them. And that made all the difference.¹

Hidden things. God's ways are not our ways, but that does not mean they are impossible to find. Why? Revealed things. Because in Christ, through Christ, with Christ we discover what it is to live faithfully, justly, peaceably. Wise things: which can sometimes be as simple as knowing on which side of a protest line you need to be standing. As simple as knowing with whom you are yoked, knowing who has promised you rest and burdens that are light. For now that is enough. In Christ the hidden is revealed; the wise and faithful are now visible. Come and rest in that good news.

Amen.

¹ "Home Front", C. J. Chivers, *New York Times Magazine*, June 28, 2020, p. 46.