

**“Mysteries to Ourselves, for Sure”**

Romans 7:15 – 25a

“I love Jesus, who said to us  
Heaven and earth will pass away.  
When heaven and earth have passed away,  
My word will remain.  
What was your word, Jesus?  
Love? Affection? Forgiveness?  
All your words were one word:  
Wakeup.”

-Antonio Machado, in translation by Robert Bly

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As Westerners, we think we can change all things to suit us. We’ve inherited this grand tradition – which we in this great nation have inherited from our European roots – of believing that whatever we want, we can create, we can make. Anything, anything we want can be created in this grand and beautiful land. Of course, in order to create the nation we wanted, the culture we wanted, the society we wanted, we had to move and remove people who got in the way; those people, for example, who lived and worked on this land for thousands of years before the Europeans arrived, the native peoples and societies on this land.

Most of us here have been strongly influenced by Enlightenment consciousness.

The **Age of Enlightenment** was an elite cultural movement of intellectuals in 18th century Europe that sought to mobilize the power of reason in order to reform society and advance knowledge. It promoted intellectual interchange and opposed intolerance and abuses in Church and state. Enlightenment thinking originated between 1650 and 1700. The “founding fathers” of the United States were Enlightenment thinkers. The main ideas of the enlightenment were to abolish serfdom, centralize government, give people more freedom, and to have all religions treated equal.

1. a confidence in reason or intellectual enquiry to bring greater happiness and progress to humanity;
2. a belief that all aspects of the human and natural worlds are susceptible of rational explanation; and
3. the desire to battle against ignorance, dogma, superstition, injustice and oppression. And so, to enlightenment thinkers, the culture of the native peoples was not “enlightened,” and needed to be replaced by white, European culture.

You and I still hold many values of Enlightenment thinking. We believe, for the most part, that technological change is good change; we believe that we have the power to change what has, in the past, been considered “God’s law,” or unchangeable. And in many ways, we have proven that we have the power to change things to our satisfaction. The problem is, we are still human beings, subject to human failings. Poor souls!

We are still, like St. Paul, befuddled by our own human-ness! We are still troubled by our own inability to live up to our best standards, our best values. In situations that cannot be changed, we continue to do our best to change things, and we live in a kind of battle with what cannot or can be changed.

I think St. Paul must have been a good United Methodist! He talks like a good, old-time Methodist, someone who takes his faith journey seriously, and who knows his faith journey is enlivened by his telling the truth of his own reality. He sounds like someone who knows he is dogged by a part of himself he simply can’t control! He sounds like a person who

has spent time in Methodist class meetings, telling the truth about himself, honestly speaking out his failings, admitting his faults.

We are not people who are easily given to telling the truth about ourselves. Oh, we may think we tell the truth, but actually, we share only our best thinking. We tell others things about ourselves that we hope will impress them, make an impression, make us look good.

Paul's admission in this scripture doesn't make him look good. Paul's admission makes him look human, makes him look like someone who doesn't "have it all together."

That's what the journey of faith is about, people. The faith journey isn't about getting all dressed up to come to church, looking our best. The faith journey isn't about thinking we know exactly what to do next. The faith journey isn't about feeling proud of what we've accomplished, and knowing that the people at church can see just how good we are.

No, here, St. Paul is a great role model. He comes to church today in his tattered best, showing his wounds, his humanness, his faults. He talks about those things because he knows only God can heal him, only God knows what's right or good, and only God can save him.

St. Paul isn't the best Enlightenment man, although he is probably "enlightened," to what is true!

Our faith is about waking up. It's about waking up by telling the truth of who and what we are. Our faith is about telling some trusted people our dirty laundry, and about giving thanks to God for how that dirty laundry led us to trust in God.

"What was your word, Jesus?

Love? Affection? Forgiveness?

All your words were one word: Wakeup!"