

I. Advanced organizer: Ancients and Blue

- A. **When David was out in the fields** with sheep and looked at the skies that inspired his writings of God's majesty, **what color did he see?**
- B. **When Moses stood before the Red sea**, and held out his staff before the water, and the Hebrew people watched the water well up and divide, **what color was the water?**
- C. **If you answer, "Blue", you're wrong.** In recent years, studies have been done noting that the Hebrew Bible has no word for the color blue.
- D. The Hebrew Bible has lengthy descriptions of nature, **but nowhere in it does it describe the sky or the water as blue.** They didn't have a word for it. It turns out the Ancient Hebrews weren't the only ones. **Ancient language scholar have noted that no ancient languages had "blue".** The whole discovery began when an avid fan and student of Homer noticed that his perception of color seemed off, and upon further investigation, that there is no blue. Which led folks who studied ancient languages to look at others and discover it's not just Hebrew and Greek. Every ancient language was without Blue. In fact they all pretty much followed the same pattern. Started with Black and White, then eventually named Red, then yellow and green, and finally, lastly: blue. The Egyptians seem to have initially discovered it, and then they carted the first Blue dye.
- E. **Could they see it?** Study performed with the Himba tribe from Northern Namibia that has no word for "blue" to see if they could tell the difference between blue and green. Gave them this test. Folks either couldn't find the outlier, or it took them a very long time, or made lots of mistakes first.
- F. Don't believe it? **They also tested various shades of green.** They have more names for various versions of green, and so the same people had no problem finding the outlier here. Can you? Most English speakers can't. (show slide) It's this one. (show slide)
- G. What these researchers believe is that though these humans have always had the same number of color receptors, the same capacity to see blue, they haven't always used it **because they didn't have a name, a category for it, a reason to notice it.** Someone had to point out that it was unique and give it a name before they could really perceive it and understand it in a way that allowed them to experience it. Now I don't know about you, but I think blue is a really beautiful color. It's Haven's signature color. Can you imagine living in a world where you can look directly at something as beautiful as blue and not be able to see it?

II. **Wrapping up a series on beauty.** And hearing things like this - that humans used to not see blue — makes you kinda wonder. **If there are things as basic as color that we have the capacity to miss and not experience, what else is just completely beyond us and we don't even have a clue?** Particularly, when it comes to thinking about how we experience faith, how we experience the Divine, the cosmic realities, this feels like a relevant question. Is it possible that in our practicing of faith, in our reading of the Bible, in our traditions and our liturgies, we're leaving something out, unaware of what we're blind to? How would we even know?

- A. **Richard Rohr, a Franciscan monk and teacher on spirituality**, talks a lot about this, and about how we're actually hard wired in our brains to look for certainty, that which we have language for, which we can clearly name, and also how that challenges us when it comes to thinking about issues of faith, and spirituality. (video from Rohr - first 3 minutes.)
- B. **Our minds are dual minded.** We see first black and white. Dark and light. But we need something that leads us out of this kind of duality and gives us new kind of language if we're ever going to see and embrace true beauty. If we're ever going to see blue. I think the Apostle Paul had a sense of what that language might be.

III. **1 Corinthians 1 and 2**

- A. First, the Setup. Starts with Paul speaking about the contrast between what Jesus means to those who've found life in him and those who haven't.

- B. 1 Corinthians 1:8 -

8 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

2:1 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

- C. Here primarily Paul seems to be contrasting those who find life in Jesus and those who don't, and how differently they experience the wisdom of God from one another, but then he moves to focus more on those who are Jesus followers, explaining what really sets them apart.

6 Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,

nor the human heart conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him"—

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are

foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?"

But we have the mind of Christ.

IV. The wisdom of humans is dual minded. The wisdom of God is mysterious.

- A. Paul is in a sense speaking in oppositional language because that is how humans think and often communicate. But even as he does, he's making appeal to something different.
- B. The "foolishness" of human wisdom is what all humans are naturally inclined to. We think in duality and we see it as wisdom. We don't know any other way. If he sounds judgy, I think it's because he's trying to make the case that no one, no human culture - not the Jews with the deep religious fervor, or the Greeks with their rigor of logic and philosophy can understand the wisdom of God on their own. We can't get there because we're dual minded. Christ crucified makes no sense.
 - 1. **"Christ Crucified" - entry point to mystery of God for Paul.** We hear "christ crucified" and glaze over- religious language we accept dogmatically. "Christ" - Anointed One, Messiah, the king like David who would reign and restore Israel to its glory. "Crucified" - killed by the Roman oppressors. Not a liberator but a victim. For Jews - undoes so much of their theology; has to be rejected. The dual mind can't absorb the tension. The Greek philosopher finds it unintelligible, and so dismisses it too.
- C. God seems to be challenging the dualistic point of view again and again. Taking the things that are easily dismissed and disregarded, too quickly judged, prejudiced against, and having them be the place where another kind of wisdom is discovered. A wisdom that isn't slick and polished and well produced. A wisdom that is rich, and deep, and mysterious.
- D. Mystery - in Bible not so much a puzzle that needs to be figured out (like a crime novel). It's something hidden that can only be comprehended through revelation.
- E. Something Paul talks a lot about in the new Testament. *Mysterion* shows up twice here. 28 times in the New Testament, 21 of those are Paul. Paul understood the things of God as being by necessity mysterious. To not see the mystery means to miss the beauty of God.

V. God's Spirit leads us into mystery.

- A. God gives the Holy Spirit so we can enter the mystery. Enter denotes that there is depth to mystery. Mystery is like a realm you enter. Not a puzzle to be solved. If God is truly God, we *can't* conceive him. But he does seem to want us to come to know him.
- B. **Example - marriage.** *Lemonade* as portrait of myriad of emotions we feel within a marriage, specifically a challenge in marriage. True to our life experience. Marriage is not a simple formula; not like a fairy-tale. There is nuance. There is struggle. There is intimacy. There is pursuit and withdrawal. There is friendship and frustration. Passion and pain. And that dance you do through the years, of truly letting someone in, of letting yourself become truly undefended before another. And as you do this, to also walk in the great privilege of entering the undefended before you. And when that happens, when true intimacy, and companionship, and life lived together becomes the fabric of your reality, and as at some point you realize you really are not two but one, you recognize that this is so much more beautiful and multifaceted than a marriage certificate or a ring or a wedding or any superficial formulaic portrait of marriage could allude to. It can't be represented very easily because the representations always fall short. But it can be experienced. It can be lived. God seems to be inviting a similar experience for us with Him.

- C. **How?** vs. 10 - Spirit searches the mind of God, brings us into his mind, his thoughts, his wisdom. Helps us move from knowing about God to knowing God.
- D. Without the Spirit, can't get there. **Verse 14 - "unspiritual" - in Greek, word is literally "the natural person"**. The person whose thinking in a natural fashion, hasn't experienced that eye opening revelation, is dual-minded - this is who Paul is talking about. They can't "welcome" - the gifts of God because they can't experience them. The word "understand" here is not a cognitive word. It's experiential. You can't perceive, let alone welcome, that which you have no framework for. Can't see that you don't know blue. Can't tell that your thinking is binary.
- E. **vs. 15, word "discern" means judge the value of - appraise**. No one can correctly judge the value of God's gifts, the mystery of God, without entering it. You can't appraise the value. It's worthless, meaningless.
1. **my experience as a church planter** - speaking to people who aren't church goers or spend much of their life pursuing faith, my whole story is kind of hard to receive. And at a cocktail party, it feels kinda hard to tell.
 - a) Last week, Jason and I were at a party, likely only churchgoers in the room - met doctors, lawyers, teachers, tech workers, when it came time to say I pastor a church start up, folks were kind of bewildered. "I've never met anyone who has done anything like that before." someone said to me. "Why would you do something like that?"
 - b) It's a challenge to know how to answer that question in a helpful way. **How do I explain my journey of trying to enter mystery for the last two decades with someone who doesn't really acknowledge the mystery?** Can I talk about that journey, share the moments I felt like perhaps the mind of God was stirring within me? Do I share that thing that happens when the Spirit moves and I get bigger vision of the world, I'm taken outside of my own dual-minded perspective, and I experience something that feels Divine? Do I share the moment I thought God might be saying many years ago, "Someday you guys are gonna start a church"? The moment I thought years later God might be saying "How about Berkeley?" The number of times people prayed for me, and shared pictures or words that came to mind as they prayed. Words about trailblazing, about pioneering, about God creating me and empowering me to be a person who goes out ahead of a new thing and leads others into bringing it to life?
 - c) As I've waded into these conversations multiple times now in the last couple of years, **I have found that I can tell early on if the person I'm talking with might track with me**. And it's not about whether or not they're a church goer. But those who are most open and understanding and supportive are **the people who are on similar journeys themselves. Whatever their language or their practice, they too are aware that we're all too frequently not seeing everything**. They are trying to see beyond; to live in a non-dual way, with a sensitivity to mystery, and so they seem much more open to receiving me and my story, to welcoming the gifts of the Spirit, than those who can only call mystery, "foolishness".

VI. How do we resist dual-thinking and enter the mystery?

A. Make room for contemplation.

1. Richard Rohr video, part 2
2. **Contemplation - taking off a different head, and putting a new head on**. A head doesn't see things from the perspective of me. A head that doesn't judge and dismiss half of. **A head that accepts all**. The good and the bad of what it is.
3. **Tradition of Christian mysticism** - Catholic monks and nuns who devoted themselves to an experience of God that went beyond rational understanding, to a kind of union with the divine.

- a) **The Cloud of Unknowing**. picture that there is a cloud that separates me from God, that my mind cannot penetrate, but my soul, the non-binary part of me, somehow can. His practice, repeating one syllable word in silence about God, the image being that that word was like an arrow that pierced the cloud and could make its way to the other side. And when it got there, you could experience union.
- b) **Theresa of Avila** - compared the soul to a castle within us, a castle that almost has a structure of crystal, in which Christ is in the centermost room and is beckoning us to go deeper and deeper from the activity of our frenetic outer world, the place where the crystal is cloudy and the rooms are filled with serpents and other creatures that busy our hearts, into the place where the light of Jesus can shine most brilliantly, and where we can be fully joined to Jesus.

B. Make space for the gifts of the Spirit.

1. While I think there are some limitations theologically to much of what comes from the Pentecostal and charismatic wing of the church, as there are for all wings of the church, **I'm so grateful for the rich inheritance we have from that portion of the church** that I've received, particularly the sensitivity to God moving in our day through supernatural means by way of the Holy Spirit. **I can't understand a lot of how it works**, and honestly, I think that might be a part of where we get off the rails theologically, is when we try too hard to interpret things that are fundamentally experiential and mysterious in a black and white way. **But though I can't understand how it all works, I can't deny the power of it in my life and the good fruit that an openness to the gifts of the spirit has yielded me and Jason.**
 - a) **Praying in tongues** - don't really get it. Can't deny that at times it has felt particularly powerful.
 - b) **Healing** - I've seen really amazing things happen when hands were laid on people and they were physically miraculously held in incomprehensible ways. I've also seen lots of people prayed for and not have that experience. I can't understand quite why that is in a satisfying way, but I can't dismiss it either.
 - c) **Prophetic words** - so much of my hearing from God has come through not only my own sensing of words from God, but often more clearly, what God has given others to share with me. Jason, even when he wasn't sure he believed - delivering really accurate, helpful pictures from God.
2. I'm asking, **how can we press into more of this at Haven?** Making space for the gifts to be fully expressed, even as we long to be a church that is comprehensible to outsiders. What that cannot mean, is that we become a church that silences the voice of mystery because it's weird.

C. Keep asking questions.

1. **Rowan Williams**, the current Archbishop of Canterbury in England, says this about the mystery of God: **"there's always more"**. We're never gonna fully grasp the answer to our question. We never reach the end of the quest, at least in this age in this mortal life. We only press in deeper or we stop questing altogether. When we come to that we don't understand, do we dismiss and pull away, or do we enter the mystery, the tension, the non-duality of it all? Can we take our questions to him and experience him helping expand our capacities to perceive more of God as we pursue them together?

VII. Ending story:

- A. **Junia and her teacher. Teacher is non-binary gender.** Prefers in English **the pronoun "they" rather than "he" or "she"**. School is dual immersion, Spanish and English. Spanish is a binary gendered language. "Teacher" is generally "Maestro" for male and "Maestra" for

female. For those who are non-binary, problematic. This teacher known as Maestre. Parents struggle with it; don't often remember to use the preferred pronoun. But Junia, after being confused, was helped early in the school year by Lourdes' explanation that they is part boy and part girl. Some of both. Most people are one or the other, but some folks are a mix of both. And when that's the case, "they" is the right pronoun.

- B. Recently I was playing with the kids, joking around asking something like "How do you get so cute? or Silly, Or fun, and the girls said, "from You mommy". And I said, "**And from God. I think it was mostly from Him.**" And immediately Junia looked at me with reproach? **Him? Him? God? You mean "They"**.
- C. I don't think Junia was making an allusion to the Trinity. **But she was highlighting a facet of God's mystery; a facet of non-binary that even her six year old mind has integrated and learn to interpret with acceptance. Junia knows that God is beyond gender; neither male nor female, but somehow both.** And now Junia knows a person like that, too. Maestre is like God, and if "they" is the appropriate pronoun for her teacher, it must be the appropriate pronoun for God too. Maestre by their very presence in Junia's life, and commitment to be themselves out loud has taught Junia a framework with which to receive God, free of the endeared baggage many followers of God have struggled with for centuries. My child's non-binary gender kindergarten teacher has taught her something important about God.
- D. Now there are many Christians who'd be shocked and greatly offended by this assertion, but this to me seems like **the exact kind of way that God seems pleased to use the offensive, the dismissed, the looked down upon, the "foolish" to "shame the wise"**. He takes Maestre, the child, created by Him, in His image that is least understood by the dual-minded, and says "This one is like me". This child reveals me. For those who have eyes to see, this is true beauty. May we all have eyes that are ever more perceiving the mystery and beauty of God in our midst. Amen.