

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

⁴ yet their voice^a goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵ which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;

the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;

⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the LORD is pure,

enlightening the eyes;

⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring for ever;

the ordinances of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover by them is thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² But who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.

¹³ Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

In the 13th chapter of the Book of Numbers, in the First Testament of the Bible, we read the story of Moses sending 12 spies into the new land of Canaan, to return in forty days with a report. Two spies, Joshua and Caleb came back with a very different (and favorable) report from the other pessimistic 10.

The sending of spies to check out the lay of the land has been a long honored strategy in military conquest. Even today, it is done, although more often spying with electronic equipment.

There was once a general who sent spies behind enemy lines to see what was going on. One spy returned and said, "These are a pagan, and perhaps even cannibalistic, people; they attack one another." A second spy similarly confirmed. "I saw them going up to one another and quietly grappling ahold of each another and then wrestling with the other, in what looks like quiet desperation." A third spy, who was braver than the first two, had gotten closer – close enough to hear them, and reported, "They are a people of civility and culture; they often dance with one another, to all kinds of different music."

Dancers look quite different to those who cannot hear the music.

Today's scripture came early in our worship – in the Call to Worship. It is Psalm 19. It is a teaching Psalm – teaching about the splendor and importance of TORAH – sometimes translated as "LAW," but that is as insufficient as a

translation of “SHALOM” from Hebrew into “PEACE.” Shalom means more than mere peace; it means wholeness and completeness, and unity. TORAH means more than LAW; it is God’s teaching, God’s prescription of how life is meant to be lived abundantly and in shalom with the Creator of all life.

Psalm 19 taught its earliest hearers, as well as us, about the importance of our UNIFYING PRINCIPLE ... what is at the CENTER OF OUR LIVING.

HOW WE SEE LIFE will indeed determine the WAY WE LIVE LIFE.

An experiment was done a number of years ago in American psychology in which 80-some year old people were taken on a one week retreat. On this retreat, they were kept in a place that was decorated to look like it was 20 years before. They were given clothes to wear, like they had worn 20 years before. They were invited to live as they had lived 20 years earlier. At the end of that week, physiological measurements were taken, and for the most part, their bodies had returned to what they had been like 20 years earlier. They were, for the most part, 20 years healthier than what they were prior to going on the retreat.

The same experiment was repeated over the succeeding years in England, Korea, and Scandinavia, with similar results – teaching that **HOW WE SEE LIFE will indeed determine the WAY WE LIVE LIFE.**

Harvard social psychologist and researcher Dr. Ellen J. Langer, after a lifetime of conducting such experiments, has concluded that most of us living today, do so mindlessly, and are so mindless that we are not even aware of how mindlessly we live our lives.

- What are the guiding principles by which you live your life?
- What, do those around you and dear to you, see as your guiding principles?
- By what principles do those around you, and those dear to you, choose to live their lives?

I’ve been looking around me more closely for the past few weeks, and I have noticed people living lives that remind me much of the “senior sermon” I preached at seminary all those years ago.

In that sermon, I observed that most, if not all, of the people in the seminary community (teachers and students alike) were “MUTANTS.” As I preached, I moved about through the congregation gathered in our seminary chapel and reminded folks of how often we had told, and heard, our “call story;” how often we had told, and heard, what our lives were like. And I concluded that we were all a bunch of mutants. Hardly any of us fit the mold called “NORMAL.”

Today, although time prohibits, I could move among this congregation, and remind us of our different stories – about what a bunch of MUTANTS we are – because our lives somehow don't fit into some definition that we have floating around of what "NORMAL" is supposed to look like.

And many of us will desperately wear ALL KINDS OF MASKS to try to convince others, and ourselves, that we really are "NORMAL." We get so used to doing this, that I suspect Ellen Lang is correct: most of the time we wander through life mindlessly, simply trying to keep the mask in place, trying to be NORMAL, and not really paying attention to what is going on.

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While I was on vacation two weeks ago, my daughter and son-in-law took Jane and me to a family ART CLASS. I did not want to go. I had been raised to believe that I didn't have an artistic molecule, let alone bone, in my body. But, in the hands of a good teacher, I found that I had fun painting. And I found something else that I have not yet found the words to express.

But, after that night, I bought some acrylic paints, and some canvas boards, and some brushes, and I have done four little paintings now.

And here's is what I have discovered in these past two weeks. **I don't get into the car now and drive, without noticing what the sky looks like, and giving thought to how to paint it.** I am constantly seeing, and composing, scenes that I would like to paint. **IT IS CHANGING HOW I SEE LIFE** and it is, more importantly, **CHANGING HOW I PAY ATTENTION TO LIFE.**

Moments sometimes pop up that interrupt our mindlessness. What will we do with them is the question.

Last week I had conversation with a local business owner. She was in the process of hiring people to work in her business. She told me that, one day, she "CAUGHT HERSELF" trying to find people to work in her business who were just like herself. Then the dawn of realization came to her: What she should be looking for were people who would help make both her and themselves successful in her business. Whether or not they were little clones of herself was not so important. WHAT I NOTICED was that she now found herself being open to accepting people who were NOT LIKE HER into her world. And she was discovering, perhaps for the first time, that her life was being enriched by the diversity.

Psalm 19 taught it's earliest hearers, as well as us, about the importance of our UNIFYING PRINCIPLE ... what is at the CENTER OF OUR LIVING.

HOW WE SEE LIFE will indeed determine the WAY WE LIVE LIFE.

For those who live mindlessly, *there is no speech, nor are there words; the voice is not heard.*

However, to those who WILL PAY ATTENTION, the TORAH of the LORD **WILL** *day to day pour forth speech, and night to night declare knowledge ... the voice goes out through all the earth and the words to the end of the world. In [these words] God....*

Whose lives, do you know, that are lived like that?

- People who live with God at the center of their life, not themselves.
- People who don't see everyone as either "us" or "them" – even in the concept of trying to "be nice to THEM"
- People who live lives that empower other people, instead of trying to get power over people.

These are people who, when you see them living, you know that they are not mindless; they are indeed living lives centered on God's Kingdom, on God's Torah.

Are there people who see **your life** lived like that?

Do people close to you see you living a **mindless life** or a **re-minded life**?

- Do you pay attention to what is at the center of your life, to your guiding principles, or do you just roll along trying to live into what others have taught you is "normal"?
- How much time do you spend listening *day to day pouring forth speech, and night to night declaration of knowledge ... the voice going out through all the earth and the words going to the end of the world. In these words: God....*
- How often do you RE-MIND yourself that your goodness and your satisfaction in life does not come from life's circumstances, or from the fact that you are a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold? A goodness that comes from within?
- How much time do you focus on relationships in your life, as opposed to "being right"?

- How much of your daily living do you **actually live authentically** – being yourself, instead of **trying to wear some mask of “being normal.”**

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You really **CAN** choose. You really **DO** choose. **Every day.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.