

1 Samuel 8:4-20

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-25

I can't remember where I read it first. I have spent a great deal of time this week trying to track it down. I feel like it was C.S. Lewis, but I can't be sure. The gist of it was the interplay of experience and emotion. The idea that some experiences aren't "real" but just getting caught up in the moment. On the other hand, we often talk about one cannot "really" understand an experience until one has experienced it. So is the emotion conveying the experience or masking it? Does reality require our being in the moment, or an objective understanding of what happened? What is real?

That may be a little meta for a Sunday morning, but it is a question invited by our readings today, the contrast between appearance and reality. From 1 Samuel, Israel wants a king, when in reality they already have one. God is their king. In our Gospel reading, Jesus is thought to be "out of his mind," but in reality he is the one grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit. His real family is not the biological one, but those who share in the kingdom of God. And our reading from 2nd Corinthians is about the real building of God, "a house not made with hands" but "eternal in the heavens." Things are not always what they seem, because God is working in the world.

When we think of something being "real," we generally mean that we can actually touch it, taste it, see it, smell it, hear it. Reality is what pertains to our senses. But as Christians, we know that there is more to reality than just what we can sense. There are realms outside of the physical to which we have access. In many ways, that which we can actually touch and see and the rest are merely reflections of the deeper reality. As St. Paul puts, "Now we see through a glass darkly." We are unable to perceive the true reality that underlies our existence. But we are given glimpses. That is what Scripture contains. That is what is revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ. Those mere glimpses of the greater reality. But glimpses are all that we can handle for the moment.

I grew up in a tradition that worked hard to incorporate the emotional in with worship. The more cynical would call it manipulation. Trying to manufacture a particular emotional response to the sights and sounds of worship. People talked of being caught up in the moment. Worship should evoke feeling. And there is something to be said for that. The deeper reality that lies beyond the senses is sometimes best glimpsed when we take the thinking out of it. We can be too cerebral and turn our meeting with the divine into a mere intellectual exercise.

In Anglicanism, we try, as we do in so many ways, to find a middle way between emotional manipulation and worshiping like Vulcans. We intend to lift our hearts unto the Lord. At the same time, we seek to make whatever experience one has of church genuinely one's own. Rarely do Episcopal services intentionally try to evoke a particular emotional response, but many times people do respond emotionally. When it happens, it is genuine, not coerced. Some people want to lose

themselves in worship, and that is fine. It's just not what we do generally. We let the service speak for itself.

Of course, the primary point of worship is not to affect the worshipers. The audience for our services is not those gathered, but God. Mark [Butler] and the choir work really hard to provide beautiful music each Sunday, but the music is for God. They use the gifts and talents that God has given them to praise God, and we get to listen in. But they aren't singing for us. I try my best to write sermons that help point us to God. I try to throw in stuff to keep you interested, but that's only so I can slip in stuff that might make us a little better at worshipping God. The liturgy is done to the best of our abilities not to make it nice for us, but so that we can join together in worshipping God. The focus of our worship is to be God. The focus of our lives is to be God. Because God is the true reality that underlies the physical world we inhabit.

When our Lord seemingly dismisses the idea of family in our Gospel reading today, he is not saying that family is unimportant; but that family is not defined solely by DNA. Family is a concept greater than biology. The Lord Christ is pointing us to a deeper reality than the surface. The ties that bind us together as the family of God are just as strong as, if not stronger than, those that bind up traditional families. Indeed, we may have family members from whom we are estranged for one reason or another. Being kin is no guarantee of being in communion.

All of the imagery we use for God and God's Church fall short of the reality that underlies them. Even the model of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not a complete in its understanding of God. How could it be? It does not make the model useless, but we need to remember that the model is not the reality. Too often we mistake the representation for the reality, and that leads to idolatry, even among devout followers of the Christ. When our ideas, our concepts, our understandings of God, the Church, or the Bible come between us and the reality of God, we become isolators. We worship the created rather than the Creator. And it can happen even among the most sincere of Christians.

Give us a king we can see fighting for us rather than have us trust a God we cannot see. We want to worship in the tent we built ourselves rather than aspire to the worship in the eternal temple. Family can actually include folks not related to you by blood or marriage. We want to stay with the physical that we can perceive and thus control, rather than to trust in unseen things. But we are invited to transcend the merely physical. God calls us into a life that requires all that we are, body, mind and spirit. There is more to life than just what we can see and touch.

But that annoys people. People who can't see beyond their own senses. People who can't understand grace and mercy. Cast out a demon, you're in league with the demons. Feed the poor and homeless, you're a socialist. Try to protect God's creation, you're a tree-hugging liberal. Want to provide healthcare for all citizens? You're a job-killing communist. The world doesn't want spirit

and truth and love. The world wants concrete, simple answers to complex questions. And we can't give those. They do not exist. Instead, all we can offer is love, compassion, forgiveness and grace. But you know what? That's an awful lot that we have to offer. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*