

John 14:1-14
Psalm 82

St. John's Presbyterian Church
Devon, Pennsylvania
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The Flower Yet to Open

“You are God's, children of the Most High, all of you, nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.”
(*Psalm 82:6-7*)

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the father.” (*John 14:12*).

“You are God's,” wrote the Psalmist, “*children* of the Most High, all of you, nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince” (*Psalm 82:6-7*). “Children”—it's not a put down but a wake-up call. God reminding us that for all our sense of sophistication as a species, we are very, very new at this spirituality thing, still children. Seven times in the gospels Jesus teaches us adults by using the example of little children as to how we are to be, because we have gotten way ahead of ourselves. And if then, when John was writing, certainly now! Seven times in the brief letter of First John, the author calls us little children. Spiritually, this is what we are.

Let's try to put ourselves in perspective. Our universe has been evolving for an incomprehensibly long time, 13.7 billion years. Setting this against a sixty minute scale, our little planet starting out broiling in hot gases and molten lava, without water or oxygen or any form of life, came into being about 18 minutes ago. But our species, *homo sapiens*, first saw the light of day barely 1½ seconds ago. And civilization, when we began to build and occupy cities, came just one fifth of a second ago—about the speed it takes for a world class sprinter to leave the starting blocks while still airborne. As a species, we still have an ultra-marathon to run, assuming we have anything habitable left to leave to our grandchildren.

Do you get a sense of how little time we have been around, and by contrast how much time we still need for humanity to come to real maturity. We have barely cracked the egg from which we are hatching. If this is true of us as human beings, how much more true is it of us as spiritual beings. “God's” the psalmist calls us. Children of the most high. That's not used lightly. And if we have made progress in our spiritual formation in the 3,000 years since the psalmist, how, one wonders, can that be measured?

In some respects it is easy for we so-called “advanced nations” to be wowed by the stride we've made in technology, medicine, education, transportation, and human services in the last century. We've been to the moon, sent probes to Mars and other planets, and looked at the expanding margins of our vast universe. We can create human organs, transplant existing ones, and 99 percent of the U.S. population over 15 can read and write. But spiritually, we are as primitive as bacteria.

Do yourself and your household a favor. Get yourself and your household in touch with your God side; the God-part of you that Jesus promised *will* do far greater things than even he did. Jesus was not blowing smoke to get our attention when he said this. It wasn't his style. He meant it. He knew the untapped capacity of God within us.

As God comes through best when we are focused in prayer or study or contemplation, perhaps you could start by turning the T.V. off for a couple of hours each night. I know, it helps you veg-out after a long day, and there are times when no T.V. at all would be purgatory or worse. How would I survive without English Premier League soccer on Tuesday afternoon, or Dickens' “Little Dorrit” series on Sunday night.

Read a chapter in a good book for an hour. Read to each other—there's a thought, actually speaking without an agenda or interruptions. I know a couple of families who've been hooked on this for decades.

Or this, something else you might try. I had a conversation with a clergy colleague this past week who told of an acquaintance who was in some sort of study group—I sensed the topics were all over the map—who drew the assignment of leading the group in a study of a Bible passage. He hated the idea, had little more than disdain for anything religious, and thought the Bible the product of a vengeful and pointless God. But he had an assignment. So he went to work, calling the young pastor, whom he knew, though he did not worship there. Marcus gave him some suggestions, and the caller went to work. Some days later he called Marcus back, absolutely blown away. “Is it all like that?” he asked. “I was dumbstruck! I had no idea anything could be so rich with meaning, so multi-layered and powerful in its teaching.” Frankly, after studying the Bible in depth for forty years, I’m still blown away every morning when I read, ever so slowly, the few verses of my daily devotional. I find myself in a realm that is unparalleled in its accuracy about my life, it’s honesty, it’s directness without calling me names, and most of all, the embrace I feel from our loving God. Oh, I know, there are a few passages in the Old Testaments that I still can’t reconcile with the God I have come to know in Jesus. But to allow my inability to comprehend to tarnish the whole, would be like responding to a child’s “not getting” something we hold important by moving away and leaving no forwarding address. You would not do that to your child. Neither would God to you. Yet it is often what we do to God.

Over 120 times, by my count, the Bible reminds us that God is not at a distance, like one whose telephone number you’ve mislaid, but is within. We bear the stamp of God within us. And when we do something rich with goodness, or truth, or compassion, selfless courage, the goodness we feel is God’s implanted goodness worn on the surface. Which means that others see it, too. To make that experience more than an occasional or serendipitous glow, we need to visit that place within, where God resides, daily. Put in rather crass terms, you wouldn’t get paid much for not turning up for work on a daily basis, nor are you likely to learn much or be effective at what you do. It’s little different as a Christian. Coming to know the living God through Jesus means turning up for work, too, and building a relationship that blesses far beyond ourselves.

You all know how a flower opens by following the sun, until it’s time to rest for the night. Then it rises with the sun again in the morning. There’s nothing physically connecting the flower to sun beyond a stream of infinitely tiny packets of light energy. But that is all and everything the flower needs. So, it obediently seeks out its life source. Without the sun, fed only by a world that is alien to our basic nature anyway, the flower does not open.

William Wordsworth’s famous field of daffodils is still there below his former home at Rydall Mount, in the English Lake District. If you were to take time lapse photography of those daffodils this time of year, it would be like a multitude of bright, uplifted faces worshipping the sun, hour after hour. They yearn for nothing else, like a child’s face who has not seen the parent for a while.

Isn’t it time to break out of a worldly routine that relegates God to an emergency hotline. If our spiritual maturing matched our technological maturing as a species, we would no longer look askance at Jesus when he says, “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the father” (*John 14:12*).

Amen.