

Good morning! This has been a busy summer. I have been able to spend very little time in Wonalancet this summer. But I understand that a number of the chapel presentations have made it a summer of **confession**. Let me finish the season in that same vain. My talk this morning is, at least in part, a confession.

The confession is just this: at the beginning of the summer, when Lester asked me to make this morning's presentation, I said to him, "Lester, I'm dry. I have no idea what to say to anyone about anything."

His response was not very helpful. He said, "You know, David, I'm feeling the same thing?" Now of course, I was glad to have company, but I had really hoped to be let off the hook. Alas, it was not to be. So, here I am.

Actually, nothingness is often a good starting place. In the Buddhist tradition, as a matter of fact, the goal of meditation is to achieve the state of complete emptiness which, through some miraculous chemistry, is also the state of the fullness of Being itself. But that's not where I'm at. My emptiness is a lot more mundane than that.

Since I have no original thoughts to offer you, however, perhaps I can just share with you some things I've been thinking about. And perhaps you will find something that interests you. Perhaps there are threads that runs parallel to one of the threads I have been brooding on.

First of all, I have been going through a process of trying to determine what is important to me. I've had 63 years of living. I should certainly have figured that out by now!

Right?

Wrong. There have been a great many things that have interested me during my lifetime. Unfortunately, perhaps, they all still continue to interest me.

- I like to know **how things work**. I like to know how businesses and the economy work. I've done real estate, total quality consulting and group planning consulting.
- I get curious about some aspects of **history**, and that has gotten me involved in resurrecting a small maritime museum that some of you know about.
- I like to know **HOW** people do things, so I learn a little about **carpentry** and a little about **electrical** installation, a little architecture, a little gardening and even a little plumbing.
- My kids had a **computer** around before most people saw that computers were going to be the future. I've enjoyed learning to do some low level programming.
- I like to know about **natural things**: everything from geology and meteorology to astronomy. I have never pursued any of them in depth, but I like to know "what's there." Tuning in to this, my kids bought me a good quality telescope for my last birthday.

I like to know what kinds of things are there to know. Often, my curiosity is short lived. Once I have a rough idea of what there is to know, I am often ready to move on to the next thing. In this respect, my life has been very **broad**. But also quite **shallow**.

Truth is, I'm an **intellectual bum**. When I run into other people like me, as everyone does from time to time, I find I often don't like them. At first there is sometimes a certain superficial charm. But then you find that they drop names and are endlessly tossing out impossibly obscure facts for everyone to admire. And have you ever run into people who bite off your sentences, and finishes an idea for you? They're intolerable!

Well, at age 63, I find I'm looking everywhere for forgiveness for being this sort of intellectual bum. I thought maybe somebody here could forgive me! I desperately need forgiveness. It's a kind of addiction. And the truth is, I've come to realize that my addiction may never stop. The buzzing in my brain goes faster and faster all the time. Sometimes the buzz is about my family. Sometimes it buzzes about the Portland Harbor Museum. And sometimes it buzzes about religion.

I want you to know, I have tried therapy for this. A few weeks ago, I took some brown grocery bags into my study, and I tore fully half of the books out of the library I have there. I tore them out and I took them down to Cape Elizabeth's Thomas Memorial Library, and I left them. I lacked the moral grit to put them in the trash, but, telling myself that I was contributing to the education and growth of the Town, I stuffed them all into the return book slot. The poor librarians must have spent the whole next morning picking them up and boxing them and figuring out what to keep and what to put in the annual book sale. Gosh, I hope I didn't leave any books with my name in the fly leaf! That would be truly embarrassing! By the way, this is absolutely true!

Well, that's my confession. That's **Moral turpitude in the information age**. Actually, I feel a little guilty. I feel irresponsible. But one thing I don't feel is **alone**. After all, who doesn't lust after information? Everybody does. In Cape Elizabeth, folks spend a little over \$40 a month to bring around 90 television channels into our homes. We all think about cutting back on our tithe to Time Warner Cablevision—but then, you think, do I really want not to be able to turn on all those movies? Do I really want to miss the convention? Do I really want to miss morning news, evening news and 11:00 PM news? 'Course not! Gotta have 'em!

And of course, the internet. 90 channels—piff! I have so many bookmarks on my Netscape Navigator that it would take me the rest of my life to look just once more at all the websites I have listed. Time Warner scores again! Time Warner rules! Sometimes they bring me 10, 20, 40 email messages in a single day. Once when we went away on vacation, I came back and there were over 700 emails to read! By golly, somebody's got my number! An intellectual drifter doesn't even have a chance at reform any more. Then there's newspapers. There's radio, even National Public Radio! And even sermons at the Wonalancet Chapel, for crying out loud!

Has anybody seen the movie "The Perfect Storm?" Or read the book? The fishing vessel with brave Captain George Cluney being violently tossed about on 50 foot waves? I know you've seen the ads for it, either in the paper or on TV.

Well, I have news for you. You thought all those giant waves were made of water? They're not! They're waves of information, and they're rapidly washing in toward Wonalancet from Portland and the Atlantic Ocean, and from the Pacific Ocean. It won't be long now, and this whole valley will become a little information lake. As the waves lap at your doorstep, you won't be able to choose to listen or not listen, to read or not read! You're all going to become intellectual, verbal drifters, just like me. It's going to happen, I promise!

I've been trying to work on this problem. In the face of a mighty flood, I'm struggling to build an ark out of—you guessed it—BOOKS. But these days, my library is very sparse and trim, much more trim than I am in fact. Aside from a few computer manuals and a few other books I keep around for historical reference, my shelves now have about 15 books by a total of about 5 authors. I won't waste time listing the books and their authors, but if anyone wants to know I will be happy to share it with you later.

But these four or five guys are very special. In a way, they're map makers. They're all trying to lay out the structure of this weird and busy and perplexing world we live in. They all insist on going back to look at things that spiritual explorers talked about hundreds and sometimes thousands of years ago. Imagine that. With all the wonderful things you can find on the shelves at Borders' Books and Music, these guys want to refer back to some thinking and talking that people used to do long before any of us, long before even the Towns of Wonalancet and Tamworth, were ever thought of. These guys like REALLY old stuff.

Well, what are some of the things that an intellectual drifter can learn from these guys and their old stuff?

How about this? Everything in the world is organized in a stack, vertically, or in a hierarchy, if you like. It's really simple, too, because everything in the world, and everybody in the world, exists at one of four levels.

One of my author favorites, E.F. (Fritz) Schumacher, says that, all the shops and stores in the Maine Mall and the Mall of New Hampshire to the contrary, there are only four (4) kinds of stuff in the world.

- First, and lowest on the ladder, is all the STUFF stuff. That is, first there are all the things that just lie where they're put, unless you move them. Stones, automobiles, shoes, Barbie Dolls, refrigerators, piles of sand, houses. You know what I mean. STUFF stuff. You can cut 'em up, chew 'em up, chop 'em and dice 'em, but it's still stuff and it doesn't fight back.
- Then there's PLANT stuff. Plant stuff isn't much different than STUFF stuff, except it has some indefinable something that allows it to reproduce itself, to grow, and to take on interesting, but mostly pre-determined shapes and colors. If you kill a plant, which is easy to do, it's STUFF stuff again. But there is some invisible, undefinable something that makes PLANT stuff. We call it "LIFE" which is a good word, but the word doesn't tell you much. I never met anyone who could put life into STUFF stuff to make it PLANT stuff. But look out the window. There it is!
- Then there's ANIMAL stuff. Folks living across the street routinely turn PLANT stuff into ANIMAL stuff. But they've never told me exactly how they do it. If PLANT stuff has invisible and indefinable life, ANIMAL stuff has something else invisible and indefinable, called consciousness. You know this, because when animals are asleep, they are pretty much like PLANT stuff. There are signs of life. But when a puppy wakes up, it comes into its own because of this special extra something it has that plants don't have.

- Then there is PEOPLE stuff. Pretty much like STUFF stuff, PLANT stuff and ANIMAL stuff. But once more, what makes the difference is completely indefinable. But when you see a PEOPLE walking around minding its business, you can pretty quickly see it has something the animals don't. The reason we can see it, and the **ONLY** reason we can see it, is that have some of that same thing running around inside of us.

So, there you have it. The basic structure of the whole world. Just four kinds of stuff.

Of course it looks simple, but it really isn't. My friend Fritz Schumacher has another set of categories he likes to use. There are four of these, too. He likes the number **FOUR**. So do I. He calls them the **FOUR FIELDS** of Knowledge. They're really easy to learn, because they relate back the Four kinds of **STUFF**.

First, there's "me" or "I". There there's both an "**Inner**" me, and an "**outer**" me. So, already we have two of the Four fields of knowledge.

Second, there's the **world**. And of course, there's an "**inner**" **world**, and an "**outer**" **world**. You, of course, belong to the world outside of me. There it is. If I know about the inner and outer **ME**, and I know about the inside and the outer **WORLD** around me, I know everything there is to know. Four fields of Knowledge.

What's really tricky about all this, though, is that in Me and You and in the World, there is an awful lot's that's **INVISIBLE**. And its these "invisibles" that interest me. But they are at once both very interesting and a real problem.

For instance, we're going to come to the end of this service pretty soon. And when we do, I'll be standing outside at the back, and invariably, somebody will come past and say, "That was a great sermon pastor, or David, or whatever." It happens every Sunday, all over the world. Then, my part of this nice ritual is to say "Thank you very much! You are so kind to say so!"—as though you would dare say anything else. But what the person might really be thinking is, "Where did Lester GET this guy?" Somebody else might be thinking, "Gee, that really was what I needed to hear this morning." You can't tell.

But guess what? I won't ever know for sure! Because **YOU are completely invisible** to me! I have no way in the world of really knowing what's going on inside of you. You might be lying! I can only guess, based on past experience with you in particular and other people in general. Similarly, **I am invisible to you!** When I speak, you can only take what I say at face value, or guess at what I really mean. But what I am saying might all just be an act! **My interior state is inaccessible**, even to my kids, my wife and my closest friends. You can all see my ACTIONS, but you can't see my Motives.

But not only is it the case that each of us appears to be surrounded by a world of bodies inhabited by spooks. It goes even further than that. Because while I, and only I, can look at what's happening inside of me—my emotions and my mind—the truth is, I can't see the outside of me. Of course, I can see the outside of my body in a mirror. I mean "see" in the sense of grasp and understand. But if I want to really know myself, I cannot step outside of my own skin and observe myself.

For Example: I had a board member who quit the museum Board. I have been going through agony: What did I say? What did I do? Etc. I can't see the "me" that he saw! I like it when they all smile and say what a great job I'm doing.

That means that the only way I can truly know who I am is by conversing with you, and other people that I live and work with. In other words, the only way to get past these barriers of invisibility is to be in communication and communion with other people. And even then, the view is only partial.

Denney and I get into **arguments**. I understand married people do that sometimes. I cannot, for the life of me, imagine how anybody can be as **stubborn** as she is. But when I point it out to her, she doesn't see it! I say things like "B.J. Lives!", but she doesn't even register it!

Conversely, she likes to tell me, in the heat of battle, that I'm acting like my "banker" self. She says I have my 'banker's voice' and my regular voice. She makes reference to this banker at the most annoying times! Well—No way! I am not stuffy. I do not have a banker's voice. I am eminently natural at all times. Believe it!

BACK TO INVISIBLES. Many of the most important things in life are invisible. Maybe ALL the most important things are invisible. Consider the list:

- We can usually tell the difference between something living and something not alive. But nobody can describe or define "Life Juice." I can't tell you. But I know what it is. We all do.
- Similarly, I am very smart. I can tell the difference between a plant and an animal. And I can see signs in the way the thing behaves that tells me there is a difference. But I cannot give a refined, accurate fix on this thing called consciousness!

- I can even tell the difference between most animals and most people. I know because there is something funny about the way the human being acts. But what is it? Self consciousness, someone says. Yes, of course. But then, **what is that?** What color is it? Where is it located. What might it look like if it were not part of a person? How would you get it if you didn't have it. **INVISIBLE!**
- And now, my teacher, Fritz Schumacher points out, I find that my wife, my family, my friends and everyone else, are invisible to me. And I am invisible to them!
- Worse, I cannot even see myself as other people see me. And neither can you! People can know one another for 5 minutes. And each will know things about the other that he or she does not know about him or herself.
- And worse yet, I find that **even within myself**, the full depth and breadth of my own being is obscure to me. I long to know what is happening in my own soul. But every day, I rise and I go through the day playing one tape or another that runs continually in my head. And because of those tapes, those presuppositions, I see nothing clearly. I do not see others. I do not see myself.

There is a story in the book of Matthew of how Jesus causes a blind man to see again. A wonderful story. A miracle, some would say. But they do that every day at Maine Eye Center. I myself have been the beneficiary of a very real miracle of the healing of sight at the Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia. I can even tell you the doctor's name.

But perhaps the real miracle described in the Bible is far more miraculous than that. Perhaps Jesus miracle had to do with dropping the scales off the eyes of the Spirit. Perhaps he was after making us see others with clear eyes and open hearts. Perhaps it had to do with allowing us to see ourselves as we really are.

Perhaps it is the case that, by prayer and reflection, there is some new, but equally invisible quality that can be added to our lives. Perhaps there are five steps in the ascending ladder of "STUFF". Material Stuff, or stuff stuff. Plant stuff. Or stuff with life Animal stuff, or stuff with consciousness. Human Stuff, or stuff with self consciousness. Perhaps, just perhaps, there is another, **invisible level** available to us all: the Level of **invisible Spirit**.

Can't see Spirit, of course. But I have intuitions that maybe, there is another way of knowing. Another way of seeing, beyond the senses. Wouldn't that be a miracle, though!

I confess I am so intrigued by this idea that I want to spend the rest of my life trying to understand these invisibles.

There's a vein of theology that says that being invisible to ourselves, and to one another, is what **Original Sin** is really about. We are so torn apart in ourselves, and we are so torn apart from one another that meaningful life is impossible. Sin is not being able to "see" the invisibles.

The answer to Sin, the only answer, what the Church has called **Grace**. Grace is another elusive thing. You can't get it by trying, no matter what you do. You can think yourself into it. You can't wiggle into it with good deeds. You can't even pray yourself into it. You can't terrify yourself into it.

Grace just happens, or it doesn't happen. That's an immortal line from Paul Tillich. All you can do is put yourself in the way of it. It's like catching a train. You can't get it just any time you want it. **But you can put yourself at the station.** You can pay attention to your insides and to the others. You can meditate, you can pray. Sometimes, it happens.