

THE ESSENCE OF ALL THAT I AM



A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH, PART 1

Scripture:

Matthew 21

1. AND WHEN they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,
2. saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.
3. If any one says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and he will send them immediately."
4. This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,
5. "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass."
6. The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them;
7. they brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon.
8. Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
9. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"
10. And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"
11. And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."

"If you treat an individual as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be." – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



WHO IS THIS?

Who is this? That was the question on the minds of everyone from the priests to the politicians to the people as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Who is this?

THE WOODPECKER

There is a woodpecker that works on the apple tree just outside the window of our house. I know it is a woodpecker because it pecks holes into the bark of the tree that are about ¼" in diameter, and appear in straight rows, almost like a typewriter. There are hundreds of them on the trunk. The bird has a long beak, it is mostly grey and white in color, and sometimes I think I see a red tuft on his head. When I try to take a picture of it, it flies away. So I call it a woodpecker.

That's about all I know about it. I don't know where it sleeps or if it has a family; I don't know if it has had any near-death experiences with cats. I don't know what it thinks about, nor if it has a soul. The

woodpecker and I are "acquaintances," but we are not friends.

I wouldn't have said that the woodpecker was important news on Palm Sunday if I had not been reading the scriptures of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem in the light of a book called, *The New Earth*, by Eckhart Tolle. *The New Earth* is Oprah Winfrey's book selection, and millions of people all over the world are reading it together in the largest book study class ever assembled. Maybe you are reading it, too.

THE SQUIRREL

We also have a squirrel that runs along the top of our fence. The San Diego Natural History Museum Field Guide says it might be a *Spermophilus beecheyi* – California Ground Squirrel, or Beechey Ground Squirrel.

I don't have a name for the woodpecker, but I have a name for the squirrel. But that doesn't change much. I don't know much about the squirrel's friends and family, and I don't know what it thinks about

either. So we coexist. We make no demands upon each other, except that the squirrel stays outside, and we use the back yard at separate times.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?

Can you describe yourself more clearly than the squirrel and the woodpecker in my backyard? If I ask, who are you, what do you say?

Well, you might say, my father and mother were from such and such a country, and they are of such and such ancestry. That's no help. It is not your parents I am asking about, it is you.

I grew up somewhere and now I live here, and I went to this school. That's better, but school is out, and we want to know if you learned anything that will make you a better person. You are not your school; you are not your geography.

So who are you?

Maybe you say I am this race or that. You tell me about the house you live in; maybe you want to tell who your favorite clothing designer is. That's interesting, but it is still not describing you. Your clothing, your house, and even your race just put you into groups, and don't tell about your spirit, your soul, your essence, and your faith.

ESSENCE

**There is just one question today.
What is the essence of all that you are:
your thoughts, not your possessions;
your spirit, not the tent in which it dwells.**

- If you have been reading a new book entitled *a New Earth*, by Eckert Tolle, you may also know where I am going.
- If you were paying close attention to the scriptures, you may know where I am going.
- If you remember when the teacher quoted Descartes, who said, "I think, therefore I am," then you may know where I am going.
- *Die gedanken sind frei*; "Your thoughts are your freedom."

EGO FILTERS

We see things through the filters of our own ego. We judge almost everything by our own experience. By the standards of the world, that is a very small filter.

In most areas, with the exception of a niche of information we might possess, we lack the education and experience to make educated judgments. We judge things solely through our own ego – the sum

total of our education, experience, genetics, and the place in time where we live.

And there is the problem. When we judge things incorrectly it can lead to conflict, aggression, war, and destruction. Your own judgment is not enough. Your own experience is not enough. My own gut feelings are not enough.

We see the world through the eyes of our own ego, and that is not enough of a foundation upon which to build world peace, or neighborhood peace, or city peace, or church peace. We need to find a way to honor the essence of each other, and to make room for each other to exist.

DO YOU?

Do we see the world through the eyes of our ego?

LET'S BEGIN WITH PALM SUNDAY.

The first Palm Sunday probably happened quickly. In short, we celebrate the beginning of Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem. He rode in from the East, down the Mount of Olives on a borrowed donkey accompanied by his disciples and curious people who escorted him into town. That's about all that happened.

Later, however, we discovered that this brief drama was linked to the symbolism of the Hebrew Scriptures.

- Jesus took an historic expectation, and he modernized it.
- Let's make it a donkey, not a war horse.
- Let's make it children, not soldiers.
- Let's make it palm branches, not swords, spears, captured enemies in chains, and women who had nothing but a horrible experience ahead of them.

He caught both the Romans and the Jews by surprise. They didn't know what to make of it. This Messiah does not fit our definition of the word: Was he a prophet? Well he didn't fit the expectation of a prophet. Was he a crazy man, or was he part of a conspiracy?

Long story, short, no one knew what the right words were to describe this quick event that they had just experienced. Meetings were called; testimony was given; the media was alerted. But the story line was not clear.

Caiaphas would address the press corps – which in this case was simply the illiterate masses.

Pilate would address the same group.

Was he enemy, foreign king, religious prophet, tree-sitter, nut-case, political activist? They didn't know. So they had to think about it.

JESUS KNEW WHO HE WAS. JESUS HAD A PLAN.

It was God's plan, and the people who saw him enter Jerusalem found that he did not fit the categories that their own egos had created, and so he was viewed as an enemy. Jesus would later die, not because of what he said, but because neither the Jews nor the Romans could put a label on it, and they couldn't live with that.

Jesus knew who he was. Jesus had a plan. Jesus knew that he was a child of God. He knew that his body was a spirit, not an extension of his clothing, or what he owned.

He was a thinking spirit, and because of that he is as welcome in our time as his own.

THIS HAS SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS.

Tolle says that there is "a collective insanity" that has gripped our world. It is certainly easy to find in the story line in the last week in the life of Jesus. Jesus knew who he was, but he was villainized by the religious and political leaders who whipped the crowd into a controlled frenzy that resulted in the brutal death of the man who only preached peace and healing. (Quotes with some paraphrase)

The collective insanity that has gripped the world you and I live in is frighteningly like the world that did not welcome Jesus.

Fear, greed, and the desire for power are the psychological motivating forces not only behind warfare and violence between nations, tribes, religions, and ideologies, but also the cause of incessant conflict in personal relationships. They bring about a distortion in your perception of other people and yourself. Through them, you misinterpret every situation, leading to misguided action designed to rid you of fear and satisfy your need for more, a bottomless hole that can never be filled.

But fear, greed, and the desire for power are not the dysfunction that we are speaking of; they are created by the dysfunction, which is a deep-seated collective delusion that lies within the mind of each human being. The blueprint for dysfunction that every human being carries within is "the ego."

THE SMALL LENS

The lens of one man's eyes, one culture's genetics, religions, race, and place in history is too small. When leaders personalize their power, and assume that the measure of one mind is the measure of all that there is; this is the collective insanity that has gripped our world.

It happened at the time of Christ; it led to the downfall of the Roman Empire, and the rise of Christianity. It could happen again.

Tolle says that the greatest achievement of humanity is not its works of art, science, or technology, but the recognition of its own dysfunction, its own madness.

RELIGIONS ARE PART OF IT

Religions, to a large extent, became divisive rather than unifying forces. Instead of bringing about an ending of violence and hatred through a realization of the fundamental oneness of all life, they brought more violence and hatred, more divisions between people as well as between different religions and even within the same religion. They became ideologies, belief systems people could identify with and so use them to enhance their false sense of self. Through them, they could make themselves "right" and others "wrong" and thus define their identity through their enemies, the "others," the "nonbelievers" or "wrong believers" who not infrequently saw themselves justified in killing. Man made "God" in his own image. The eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as "my god" or "our god."

We proclaim that Christ will lead us to salvation. But this is not a battering ram to use against others. It is merely *our proclamations.*

TOLLE

And yet ... and yet ... in spite of all the insane deeds perpetrated in the name of religion, the truth to which they point still shines at their core. It still shines, however dimly, through layers upon layers of distortion and misinterpretation. It is unlikely, however, that you will be able to perceive it there unless you have at least already had glimpses of that truth within yourself. Throughout history, there have always been rare individuals who experienced a shift in consciousness and so realize within themselves that essence toward which all religions point. There is a concept being religion, and a God behind that concept. To describe that non-conceptual truth, we use the conceptual framework of our own religious experience. And that is the proper function of our faith.

The new spirituality, the transformation of consciousness is arising to a large extent outside of the structures of religion and politics.

People could not step outside of their religion and/or politics to make room for Jesus Christ. That is the reception Jesus met in Jerusalem.

Tolle says that the world will never be at peace if people everywhere don't learn how to step outside of their own ego, and look for opportunities to learn about each other and accept each other as spiritual equals before God.

That is a big chunk to take home.

Can you describe yourself without reference to your gender, your health, and your occupation or former occupation? Can you describe yourself without reference to your possessions?

Tolle says that right now, most of the world cannot. And that is our greatest barrier to be peace.

THE PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING

It is that peace that I want to talk about next week. If we can let go of our ego in accepting our spiritual selves, that is the first step in approaching what Paul describes as "the Peace that passes all understanding." And that is what Easter is all about. It is based in what happened to Jesus, and the lesson is what can happen for each of us.

GOD'S PEACE

Next Sunday, I want to talk about the peace that passes all understanding. That is God's peace.

I am at peace with the woodpecker and the squirrel, because we have each affirmed in our own ways each other's right to exist. We really don't know much about each other, but the apple tree provides us all with fresh apples, the fence provides us with security, and the roof provides us shelter from the elements, and a measure of safety. You don't have to be a biologist to appreciate a squirrel; biology just makes it more interesting.

THE RIGHT TO EXIST

Can I do for another human being the same thing I am willing to do for the squirrel and the woodpecker? Can I affirm their essence and their right to exist – even though we don't fully understand each other?

We have to start with ourselves before we can imagine relating to even one other person as a spiritual being, without just being an extension of our own ego.

Jesus went into Jerusalem as a peaceful savior. People didn't get it. People couldn't get outside of their own eyes, they couldn't get outside their own skin, and their religion was just an extension of their own egos. That madness cost Jesus his life. It was a disaster, but we don't have to repeat it.

THE OTHER SIDE OF OUR BRAINS

But there is another side of our brains we need to begin to train. We don't have to judge everything. But there is also an artistic side of our brains that calls upon even greater understanding. It is the side where our spiritual presence is lodged, the awareness side, the appreciation side, the inner purpose side, and the acceptance of the divine presence in our lives side.

ALL OF THIS CAN BE FOUND IN THE PALM SUNDAY STORY.

As you think about Easter and new life, I'd like you to use that other side of your brain that appreciates rather than categorizes and analyses.

- Maybe a hug will work better than constructive criticism.
- Maybe a handshake will work better than a verdict.
- A new taste, will replace an old habit.
- Drive home by a different route, as I asked you to do a year ago at this time of year.
- Read something that is new to you, and that you don't naturally agree with.
- This is the season for doing crazy humanizing things like that. Life is required, but the options are endless.

See the world in which God lives with new eyes, an open mind, and an open and unlimited heart, and God will change you from all that you possess to the essence of what you are.

We live in a land of freedom, and what I have described to you is the ultimate freedom.

It's all yours to enjoy.



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