Sunday, February 22, 1976
THE COMING FAITH
Isaiah 11:6-9; Galatians 3:26-28

How we see the world, creation, people, events, all that happens; and how we act, behave, depends to a large degree on our view of the world, our perception, our awareness. We see what we believe. If we believe all people except our own kind, are our enemies, we will see them that way and furthermore we will act toward them in that way, and they may very well begin to act that way in relationship to us.

To explore this further, let's use the word, "paradigm." A paradigm is a model or pattern. It is a shared set of assumptions. It's like a filter through which we see the world. Each one of us sees people, events, the world around us through some kind of paradigm. The paradigm explains the world to us and helps us to predict its behavior and our own behavior.

Here are some examples. A famous historical paradigm was the view at one time held by nearly everyone that the earth is the center of the universe. All else revolves around it, for as any fool can plainly see, the sun comes up in the east, moves overhead and sets in the west, and the stars move around the earth in predictable courses. That para-digm in its day explained the world better than any other view.

By the 16th century, however, some advance astronomers were saying that this paradigm, this idea of how the universe is organized had too many discrepancies. They saw things happening that did not fit this pattern. So, people like Copernicus began to look for a better way to explain the universe, a new paradigm. The earth, said Copernicus, moves around the sun.

But paradigms do not change easily. Copernicus was cautious. Galileo considered himself cautious. He was genuinely surprised when he was called to Rome before the Cardinals. The Establishment of that time said that what Copernicus and Galileo were proposing couldn't be true. In Rome, they took Galileo downstairs and showed him the thumbscrew and the rack. Galileo was 70 and recanted. The establishment was so eager to silence him, it introduced a forgery into his prosecution, and Galileo spent the rest of his life under house arrest.

The Establishment is always invested in the old paradigm. Paradigms are to change. In fact, those who difficult propose new ones are often persecuted and killed. They are considered very dangerous. Jesus Christ is an example. He said God loves the whole world, not just Jews. He said love your enemies, whereas the old paradigm said to hate your enemies.

The Apostle Paul proposed a new paradigm. He saw one human race. That in itself didn't get him into trouble until he became specific and applied his new idea to the problem at hand. Jews and Greeks are equal in God's eyes, he said. Male and female are equal. It's a new paradigm, one new humanity in Christ Jesus and it got him thrown out of half the towns in Asia.

Another example. For years our country operated on the paradigm that all Communists were united in a worldwide conspiracy, and all were evil. Thus, we had great difficulty in finally recognizing Red China. In the 1950's those who proposed recognizing Red China were called traitors and Communist sympathizers because they were proposing a new paradigm and applying it to the present situation. We lived for years in the old paradigm that the Chinese on Formosa were the real Chinese nation and would one day re-capture the mainland.

Paradigms are difficult to change, even when they no longer work, because we have so much invested in them.

Now what are some paradigms of 1976, and then what are some that will need to change and are changing. This will tell us something about 2076. It will tell us what is the “Coming Faith!”

1. The grand paradigm in which we live is basically scientific and rational. Scientists measure a phenomenon and try to set up an experiment that can be repeated. by other scientists. What is measurable and repeatable becomes true.

All of us, scientists or not, share the assumptions of the paradigm. If something comes along that doesn’t fit it, we feel uncomfortable, and it sounds bizarre and kooky.

Our scientific-rational paradigm has produced the absolute and splendid technological achievements of western culture. But it leaves us with. a problem, and that is that we have the tendency to consider as “real” or “true” only that which can be measured, repeated, and experienced through one or more of the five senses, and less real or untrue that which cannot. We believe that what can be described is more real than what can’t be described. Our paradigm is largely thing-oriented, materialistic and rational--verbal and intellectual.

The problem with such a paradigm is that it can limit our perception or awareness. Our belief structures impose limits on what we perceive and experience. Thus, the present paradigm leaves no room for such things as extra-sensory perception. So, if someone experiences something which is out of the ordinary and which is unexplainable in our usual terms, we too easily conclude that he or she is dreaming or crazy or out of touch with reality.

The scientific-rational paradigm is very slowly changing. Already we are aware that the mystical, transcendental, and ecstatic experiences are outside this paradigm.

2. A second paradigm or way of seeing things which is also changing, is the belief that the most important aspect of anything or person is its separateness or individuality. That is certainly important. Each one of us is unique, but it is just one aspect of anything or person.

Because we have tended to look at things, events, persons, primarily in their separateness, in isolation, we have overemphasized diversity and differences. So, for example, we have tended to see persons as blacks or whites, or Indians, or Jews, or Christians, or Moslems, rather than as part of the human race which is itself connected to all of creation.

This kind of paradigm has caused us to overemphasize independence — the belief that a single human being can detach himself from everything else and still survive. Furthermore, the fact that we have tended to see things only separately, has led us to more fragmentation and worse’than that we have often mistakenly believed that what seems different is either inferior or superior or is against us and therefore not to be trusted, but feared. What is different becomes our enemy.

So, our whole world seems fragmented. Today our lives are filled with so many sounds, noises, interruptions — there are jet engines, telephones, motors.....But maybe the varied, fragmented nature of contemporary experience can be perceived as a unity if we can increase our perception — our awareness, out that will take a new paradigm.

The new paradigm, THE COMING FAITH, is one in which we will be able to perceive the pattern in the totality; we will see ourselves as part of a unity which transcends all difference. The unity and connections have always been there.

We will see this unity, these connections, within the smallest cells of our existence as well as within the planets, stars, and other universes.

WE are not made up, as we had always supposed of only our own parts. Rather we are shared, rented, occupied. At the interior of our cells, driving them, providing much of what we need to live, are the tiniest mitochondria, and in a strict sense they are not ours. They turn out to be separate creatures, very primitive bacteria. But without them we would not move a muscle, drum a finger, think a thought.

These are just one of the many kinds of little creatures which exist within us and around us. There are many tiny beings which work and live within our cells. Our cells are not the pure entities that in the past we liked to think they were.

In fact, the uniformity, the interrelationships, the harmony of the earth's life and of the universe itself is as amazing as its diversity. We live in a dancing matrix of viruses; they dart, almost like bees, from organism to organism, from plant to insect to mammal, to me and back again, and into the sea, passing around heredity as though at a great party.

Now we know that most of the associations between the living things we know about are essentially cooperative ones. Every creature is in some sense connected to and dependent on the rest.

We were meant to live in harmony with all things. Disease and war result from misunderstood signals and from entities getting out of relationship to one another! One theory of cancer, for example, is that it is caused by cells which get out of relationship to other cells. They fail to recognize where they belong. They go crazy. They are out of harmony with all that is around them.

And not only are we connected by the tiny microbes that infect and live in all of us, but we are also connected to the larger universe in more ways than we know. We are related to what happens all around us, even to events on the sun, the moon and the planets.

Our souls, our bodies, are molecular parts of the universe, and like cells in a body, what we are and what we do affects every one of us, for we are inseparably joined. The coming faith is to expand our awareness so that more and more we perceive our connections.

The mystics among us and throughout history have always known this and have experienced it in ecstatic moments. One mystic described it this way — "I felt at one with the ocean below and with the unifying principle of all of life."

So, the coming faith is not just to see things in bits and pieces and separateness, but also to be able to experience the interrelatedness of all things, the harmony. It is that convergence that produces the ultimate state of peace.

Then as Isaiah saw it, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid."

And as our next hymn puts it, “Earth and all stars, Loud rushing planets, sing to the Lord a new song!”