

Sermon, *Essence and Existence*  
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 9.1.24

The purpose of this sermon is for you to consider thinking differently. That's it. I'm not going to ask you to get up and go do something but rather to simply try to think differently.

Today's Gospel lesson is from Mark. He began his message with Jesus saying, "Metanoia!" It's a Greek phrase that means beyond and think. Jesus wants us to think differently. He is asking the people then, and today, to think beyond rote tradition. He wants us to think in terms of love, and unity and peace. So let's give this a shot.

There are two factors in the universe – essence and existence. Essence is before, above, and beyond time. When we give eulogies, we talk not so much about what someone did on earth but rather about their essence – what made the person who they are and what we are going to miss most about that person. It's someone's essence. I had a dream that involved two of my favorite cats, Harpo and Cosby. They died when I was in seminary but in my dream, I felt their essence. The good thing about ghost cats where you can feel their essence is that you don't have to deal with hairballs and cat boxes. And that's what this dream was about – I got to enjoy their essence without having to deal with their existence. ... which is a good thing because Christi and I were on a cruise ship in this dream. You can't take an existing cat on a cruise ship but you can take the essence of a ghost cat!

Essence was in the beginning. And, for some mystery, Essence decided to create existence. Essence is in, above, around before and after existence – all the created stuff of the universe. It is within existence that we have Parkinson's disease, shootings, famine, cancer and war. It is also within existence that we have exquisite beauty like the fragile wings of a butterfly and the sunset over the Gulf. It is within existence that we choose to love one another, to share what we have, to find unity even in our differences. It is from the beauty of existence that we see the beauty of Essence and all that Essence created.

Essence decided, again, as a mystery, to become existence in Christ Jesus. It's hard to imagine, but all of Essence, before and after time, all crammed into the existence of a human. That's part of the mystery. Another part of the mystery is that once Essence created existence, existence can now change essence. Let me explain: in today's Gospel lesson, the religious leaders were questioning Jesus that his disciples don't wash things according to tradition. That's the existence part of life. Jesus talked to them about their essence – the stuff from the heart, and that he can tell what is in someone's essence by how they live. He listed off the evil stuff that can come from existence that somehow affects one's essence – murder, theft, adultery and the rest. For some mysterious reason, Essence created existence and now existence can change one's essence. Jesus was talking about guarding one's essence from one's own existence. And, here's the good news, one's essence can't be changed by what goes into the existence; only what comes out is what changes. I hear him saying that it doesn't matter what existence in life hands you, you are responsible for what your essence does through your existence.

Our friend and parishioner, Jan Webb, passed away last week. I've been thinking about her and in particular, her essence. She was widowed, twice. Life can seem unfair at times but she kept

going. Her essence was just that – to keep one’s head up and to keep helping and serving others. I suppose she could have become bitter, or not married Pat because she was a widow, but instead, she led with her essence and with love and commitment – for better and for worse. In other words, she didn’t let the existence – which includes sorrow and heartbreak – to diminish her essence.

St. Paul wrote about essence in the sense that it is patient and kind, it does not insist on its own way and is not arrogant and rude; rather this essence over comes all things and is all things and this essence never dies. We have faith hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. The Essence that created all things is the essence of love.

The problem with existence is that we are living on a particular physical plane, and that existence likes things done its own way. It does insist on its own way and that this is all there is and the one who has more things in existence is the better. Existence has a way of separating one from another; of acting with distrust and, at times, indifference. Jesus is calling us to pull from our own essence and to forgive as we have been forgiven and to love as we are loved. Essence will say that everyone in existence has their own hopes and dreams. They have their own preoccupations. And, we find, that in existence, a lot of energy and time is spent to maintain one’s existence. Jesus recognizes all that – after all, he too is in existence. But he, and everyone who followed after him, point to a greater sense of essence in all of us and the Great Essence from which we are all made to and to which we are all called by name to return to.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.