Spiritual understanding is the quickening of the Spirit within. God is supreme knowing. That in man which comprehends is understanding. MBD

Understanding is a concept often confused in overlapping definition with wisdom. Even Charles Fillmore, while noting this in his chapter on “Understanding” in the 12 Powers book, proceeds to use the words interchangeably at times. It helps me to use discernment rather than wisdom and identify that as the primary characteristic of metaphysical interpretation of wisdom. Also, I rely upon “knowing” in the heart sense, not the head sense, as a primary characteristic of understanding. Neither wisdom nor understanding as spiritual faculties depend upon intellectual facts, yet the intellect can be a training ground for both.

The book of Esther in the Old Testament is also known in Hebrew as “the scroll” or the Megillah. There is debate about who wrote it but scholars generally view it as a historical novella, dated around 400 BCE, to explain the origins of the Jewish holiday of Purim. There are details with some historical accuracy but other details are inaccurate. The King is probably the Persian King Xerxes who ruled between 486 and 465 BCE. The story has some fascinating aspects that I want to explore but I need to let you know that today’s sermon was transformed by two things that happened last week, as I lived the sermon on Understanding. Some of you may know that a couple weeks ago, a minister who served here in the past, Judi Venturini, came to service. That stirred up feelings for some people. On Thursday evening I had dinner with her. On Friday morning I read a message from another minister who served here in the 90’s, David McClure. For those who know him, I want to share parts of that message:

I wanted to share with each of you the results of my most recent PET scan. The scan indicated that the cancer has both spread and grown in size. There appears to be no further cure treatment options remaining, only palliative ones. [The dr] was reluctant to give me a time frame but indicated that it can probably be measured in months. So my decision is to fall in love with life, fasten my seat belt, get comfortable and enjoy the ride for as long as it lasts. For me that means living full-time and giving you the best I have to give for as long as I have to give it. I want to live a full and productive life no matter how
long it is. That’s because living a half-full and unproductive life sucks. Right
now I am feeling healthy with no aches, pains or indications that anything is
going on inside me. I am truly thankful for that. Thank you for the prayer
work you have done which has allowed me to come this far. Love, David.

Unity of Lehigh Valley, as a spiritual community, was incorporated December
24, 1979. It began, however, with a July meeting some years before that in
the home of Alice Ann Miller’s father. 50 chairs seemed an ambitious goal but
they were filled and people sat on the stairs. As a spiritual community we
have a history. Everyone who serves and everyone who participates becomes
a part of that history. Yves Lafontant, Max Lafser, David McClure, Jim Fisher,
Connie Forebach, Judi Venturini, Stephanie Seigh and now me. Every single
one of us and others who served as interim and support, we are all human
beings. Every congregant who is here now or who attended in the past is a
human being. We all develop our stories about what happens in our history—
stories about how we are affected and how ULV is affected. Hearing those
names may bring up strong feelings—painful or joyful or peaceful. I cannot
ignore that our history is being brought before us now. Some of us know the
whole history. Some of us have experienced parts of it; some have heard
stories from others. Some of us may be here for the first time but we also
have our own history with church and religion.

One of the most well known scriptures from the book of Esther is this: “Who
knows? Perhaps you have come for just such a time as this.” I feel I am
compelled to explore this week the idea that we are ALL here, right now, for a
quickening of Spirit and a deep healing of ourselves and our spiritual
community.

The story of Esther is a little complicated but it’s interesting because it has
female as well as male characters. In fact, just looking up the meanings of
Esther and Mordecai we find Esther representing Venus and Mordecai
dedicated to Mars. Remember that book, Women are from Venus, Men are
from Mars? Yet it takes Mordecai and Esther TOGETHER to accomplish the
good that is the result. Male and female work not in opposition but in
harmony. Neither male nor female is superior. Metaphysically, neither our
intellectual nor feeling nature is working alone but united in a spiritual focus.
There is sub-story that unfolds in Esther related to male and female. Initially the King is giving a big party and he asks the Queen, Vashti at the time, to make an appearance. She refuses. The King goes to his advisors and says, “What should I do?” The advisors say, “Whoa King buddy. The Queen is disobedient. Word will get out and all the wives in the kingdom will backtalk their husbands. You don’t want this. You should un-Queen her and show her who is boss.” So he does. Queen Vashti is banished. No more Queen. So he finds a new Virgin Queen in Esther. The interesting thing is, Esther, without being confrontational, gets the King to do her bidding—and he likes it! Keeping our faculties, our thinking and feeling nature, in harmony and Spirit guided gives a much better result. The win, or positive outcome, isn’t owned by one or the other but by both.

Let’s look at some of the metaphysical meanings of the names. Mordecai is Esther’s advisor and protector. The Hebrew meaning of “little man” metaphysically Fillmore says means “Victorious for Truth; a spiritual power working within each soul for its full redemption. Little man signifies that humbleness which always marks the truly great individual, or idea and a repentance or turning away from error and a resolute turning to Truth.”

King A-has-u-e-rus (or King A) Fillmore says metaphysically stands for “The will puffed up by its conquests and dominated by ambition. It is the function of will to rule, and when man is more ambitious than wise, he often makes a spectacle of himself.”

Haman is also interesting. Haman is the one who has it out for Mordecai. Mordecai sits at the King’s gates and even tho he is humble, he refuses to bow to Haman. And that just chafes Haman. Haman means “splendid, celebrated, arrogance and inner commotion.” Metaphysically it represents “the activity of the phase of the carnal consciousness in man (the Adversary or the Devil) that gives itself up particularly to working against man’s religious thoughts and tendencies; his highest spiritual beliefs and aspirations (the Jews).” And here is the core of the battle in the story of Esther—how to hold onto our spiritual nature against the coercion of how the world would have us be. The battle of refusing to bow to the power the world tries to exert and stay true to our true nature of love and peace. The battle of using spiritual understanding, knowing and trusting the operation of divine law, to overcome sense consciousness driven will.
You don’t really need a metaphysical bible dictionary to see the meaning in Haman being hanged in his own gallows. When we get caught up in pride and arrogance, we sort of self destruct bringing our demise upon ourselves with our own actions.

So now we come to Esther. More than being associated with Venus, Esther’s Hebrew meaning is star and happiness. Fillmore starts out portraying Esther as the softening power of love upon will (represented by the King). But then Fillmore says, “Understanding of divine law is the one necessary thing in all permanent unions. When we know the Truth, we all are one and there is no separation whatsoever.” Understanding of divine law. The Truth that we are all one.

In the Revealing Word Fillmore says, “There are two ways of getting understanding. One is by following the guidance of Spirit that dwells within, and the other is to go blindly ahead and learn by hard experience.”

I would venture to say that our history, collectively and individually, is our “hard experience.” Through every experience that we have, the Universe is seeking to reveal itself to us; it is seeking to show us how principle works and invite us to be our true selves. Esther was anxious about revealing her true, spiritual nature. Yet at some point Mordecai warns her that unless she finds some way out of this mess, she won’t be protected when the King finds out she is a Jew. That is when she asks her people to fast. This represents a purification of our thoughts. She wants to be truly spiritually guided and totally trusting God when she fearlessly enters the inner court of the King.

In the 12 Powers book, Fillmore says, “No one ever attained spiritual consciousness without striving for it. The first step is to ask. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Prayer is one form of asking, seeking, and knocking. Then make your mind receptive to the higher understanding, through silent meditations and affirmations of Truth. The earnest desire to understand spiritual things will open the way and revelation within and without will follow.”

I believe we are all here now because we have that earnest desire to understand spiritual things related to letting go of our stories about religion and our stories about the leaders and history of this spiritual community. We have to begin to discern between what has happened in the outer realm of our
physical world and what is going on in consciousness. Every challenge in the physical realm is an invitation to strengthen our claim on spiritual Truth and express it. Our history is a series of opportunities to learn more about who we are spiritually and forgive those times we and those around us forget.

As we reflect upon those who have led this community, including me, let us remember that each leader is human. As we reflect upon other experiences in any church or spiritual group, remember we are all human. We all make mistakes and we all have successes. It is not my job to determine whether or not someone else learns from the experience but it IS my job to discern what is my role and my lesson in the experience. Notice I didn’t say it was my job to write a STORY. Stories tend to have heroes and villains; right and wrong; winners and losers. Discerning my role and my lesson is a personal experience that may change me or transform my thinking but it is not a story I need to keep telling. Transformation is a process without right or wrong. Byron Katie refers to it as “Loving what is.” Debbie Ford talks about doing our “shadow work.” Jung says “that which we refuse to acknowledge controls us.”

Our history is a series of opportunities to learn more about who we are spiritually and forgive those times we and those around us forget. It is one path to spiritual understanding. Just because we choose this path, does not mean that we exclude learning from simply opening to Spirit’s guidance. And it does not mean that we cannot come to a place of spiritual understanding even if we choose that longer way home. Esther stayed open to guidance and stayed true to her spiritual nature. The Light of God expressing is who we are as individuals and as a spiritual community.

I want to offer my services in spiritual counseling to anyone who feels ready to let go of a story related to this church, a leader or any church and explore the transformation potential that gets freed up as we forgive ourselves and others. You may find you are ready for psychological counseling about a past experience. Bringing things into the light allows us to reclaim control of our lives and our experiences. We are no longer driven by anger or fear or shame. We remain spiritual beings in this human experience so free yourself to be who you were created to be. Do not allow the world to coerce you into denying your true identity. We have come here for just such a time as this!