

Proper 12 Year A 2014

About six months ago we signed up for HBO with our cable provider... One of those free trial things... ain't free anymore... so in the midst of my buyer's remorse, I have been watching movies from time to time in an effort to get my money's worth. Just this week I decided to watch *The Life of Pi*. I heard a review of it on NPR several months ago in which the film critic declared that it was a movie that was very much underrated. So it appeared on my HBO menu, and I decided to watch it.

It is a great movie. Based on a novel that came out in 2001 it is a story of Pi Patel, a young boy whose father owns a zoo in India. The zoo gets into financial trouble and has to be sold, so the family boards a vessel along with their animals and sets out from India for North America... The ship encounters a ferocious storm and sinks... all is lost, everyone on board including Pi's family. Pi finds himself alone in the ocean on a life-boat accompanied by an orangutan, a hyena, and a Bengal Tiger... The orangutan and hyena don't make it, a survival of the fittest thing... so the story becomes one of Pi and the tiger coexisting for survival on the ocean. The movie is absolutely beautiful... there are scenes of the vast diversity and abundance of sea-life... stunning sky-scapes... starlit nights, and the efflorescent and luminous ocean depths... It is a tale of the human Spirit and the quest for the knowledge of God... Like all art... the quest for the knowledge of God.

When I first heard of the title, *The Life of Pi*, I just assumed that the name Pi was an Indian name, but as it turns out... the name Pi is the protagonist's nickname based on the mathematical constant, Pi, as in the Greek letter; as in the formula to ascertain the area of a circle: πr^2 ... because according to the story, this young boy has the uncanny ability to extrapolate in his head the ratio that is Pi for thousands of decimal points. We of course know Pi to be 3.14, but that's shorthand... For more precision Pi is 3.14159... or say, if you are NASA and need more precision, 3.1415926535... but we know, if you remember your geometry, that Pi can be carried out beyond the decimal point ad infinitum... It never resolves, and never repeats a pattern... There is a scene in the movie where young Pi is dividing out the ratio, remainder after remainder, far beyond the decimal point, with nothing but chalk in his hand, to the amazement and cheering of his classmates and teacher... three blackboards full of this mathematical marvel pointing towards eternity. Now I'm an English major dabbling in the realm of Math, very dangerous... so you Math people may need to bail me out here, if I get too deep.

Now this Mathematical concept has been around for thousands of years, in western culture with Archimedes, and in the East as well. The area of a circle, no matter how small or how large can be determined if you know the radius simply squared and multiplied by Pi... But... and this is what fascinates me... We never know the exact area, because the ratio is unresolved... A circle is complete in its perfection, and yet it can never be measured exactly... there is always more to it... Its area is infinite, unresolved... ultimately mysterious... A circle of course... is an ancient archetype... a symbol of completeness, eternity... But never understood fully... though we see the beauty of its form... its rudimentary presence... a marvel... But never complete.

There is an ancient Hindu folk tale that a young warrior wishes to know the secret of the universe, and he is told to look into the mouth of Krishna, the great trickster God... to look into the circle that is life itself, and there, in the circle, is everything there is to

know.... That everything there is, is there in the circle... immeasurable... but knowable in its mysterious beauty. Julian of Norwich in the 13th century articulated the same thing... a hazelnut... all there is in the universe there in the hazelnut.

Perhaps the climactic scene of the movie is when Pi and the tiger, the tiger named Richard Parker (don't know what's up with that), have been at sea for weeks, both hungry and thirsty... everything is lost... death for the two of them seems imminent.... During another ferocious storm, Pi looks up towards heaven and screams above the wind to God, shaking his fist... as if he were Job... and he asks, "What more can I give?... What more do you want from me? I sat there on my sofa transfixed, totally caught up in the movie....What more do you want from me?! And I heard a voice as clear as day... and the voice said... everything.... Everything.

So what do we make of our gospel reading for today... Most of it consists of sayings found in the so-called non-canonical gospel of Thomas... written quite possibly during the time of Jesus... possibly a firsthand... unlike the four gospels which are not firsthand... a firsthand account of Jesus' teachings... or perhaps some more ancient lore that Jesus is quoting along with other teachers of his day... brief, terse sayings that point to the truth of who we are as humans who live in the circle of God's life.... First, we are told that in this mysterious circle that our lives have infinite consequence... like seed, like yeast... the lives that we live shape history... that our lives, like an ancient mathematical formula, a mathematical constant, determine the reality of the circle of life... like seeds, like yeast, the impact of our lives is exponential... We are not insignificant... we participate in the means of eternity.... That in the exquisite randomness of life we matter as to its beauty, its completion, its unfolding.... This is a truth attested to since the dawn of time... that we are not mere contingencies to the created order... but formulaic participants in it.... The circle is not yet complete... It depends on us.

To live the way of Jesus is to recognize and own our sacred worth... we who are privileged to live in the grand circle of life and its infinite possibility... and to trust such a life... to trust the beauty of the circle; and to make sure all are included in it. The circle is all there is. It is everything... and God is not outside of it, but a part of the formula as well... infinite, beautiful, not yet completed.... The circle not an end unto itself, but a process.

The prophet Micah speaks eloquently of the means of this circle... the exquisite formula of truth... that we are to live humbly; that we are to love kindness, and that we are to do justice... these the seeds and yeast of the kingdom of God...the seeds and yeast of the circle in its becoming... the circle immeasurable but true, whole but still being created... And what does God require of us to live in this efflorescent, luminous circle of life... Is there a word for us this day... for us who are here, in this place, because we seek to know God?... What is it that is required?... Dear brothers and sisters... everything... God requires of us... everything.