

Proper VI Year B 2018

I have found in my life of faith that I have more questions than answers. After all, theology is speculative. Y'all hear me say that a lot. I've long thought faith was more about the important questions than easy answers. The word theology literally means God knowledge... but the word knowledge is perhaps a misnomer because what knowledge we presume to have as to the nature of God is based on mere speculation. There is no place in scripture that offers a systematic theology, that is, there is no definitive analysis as to the nature of God. Only signs of God's presence... in metaphor, in myth; places where God has been, as it were; only imaginative speculation in hindsight. Theologians have stayed up late into many nights to systematize the theologies of God, and have presumed to call it doctrine. In a moment of self-disclosure in Exodus God simply says to Moses, "I am who I am."

That is not to say that our speculations are wrong necessarily or misguided. I have great faith in the human imagination's uncanny ability to apprehend the truth. I have great faith in the inspired written word, and its place in our collective religious and spiritual consciousness. But theology evolves, changes with new knowledge, and experience. The point I want to make is that because we are always living in a new context... presently called post-modernity... we have to

read scripture not as some formulaic doctrine, or as monolithic truth etched in stone... we have to approach scripture with the expectation of discovery, recognizing that God is still revealing Godself. The task for us post-modern Christians is to read our sacred lore bringing our world and its unique complexity face to face with these ancient texts, and discern what God is saying to us in our own time and place. In other words, as the world changes, our understanding of God changes. And perhaps God's understanding of the world changes and evolves as well.

One of our units of study in the Rector's Forum is entitled "the three great theologies." Again, theology is speculative, but there are patterns that run throughout scripture. Theologians have coined, categorized three patterns in speaking of God as described in Holy Scripture: The first is Theism. This is the most familiar to us, particularly in the modern west. Theism holds that God is male, and is apart from the created order. This God resides in the heavens and from time to time intercedes in creation, or not. This God is all knowing, unchanging, all powerful. This God is ultimate truth, but illusive; the "unmoved mover" according to the ancient Greeks.... Distant and unknowable. This God created the universe and set it in motion according to natural law. In Theism Jesus is the go-between, if you will, between The God of the heavens and the people

God loves on earth. But Theism has sadly offered us a way to abdicate our responsibility. We have assigned God apart... safe and distant, who hopefully in the future will act to restore the world.

The second theology is liberation. This theology holds that God's principal aim for God's people is freedom, and in particular, freedom from the oppressive structures of society. Sin for the liberation theologian is that which denies dignity and well-being to the under-privileged, the disadvantaged, the oppressed. The account of the Exodus of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt in Hebrew scripture is the principal narrative of this theology. Matthew picks up on his theme in the New Testament and refers to the Jesus movement as the new Exodus... freedom from the oppression of Roman occupation. This theology, as one might imagine, has found commerce among people who live in oppressed countries... in Latin and South America.... In Africa, and Asia... among African American communities in our own country. People in Black churches know well the story of the Exodus.

The third theology is process. The term, process theology, was coined by Alfred North Whitehead in the early twentieth century. This theology holds that God is not unchanging; but that God is evolving as the creation evolves. That God

learns through experience... that God does not exercise God's power through omnipotent coercion, or force, but through intimate persuasion. This theology is similar to the pantheistic religions which believe that all things are of God's very being... that God is not aloof and other, but that God is intimately connected with a creation that is still becoming.... That God is becoming, growing, as the creation grows and becomes. In this theology there is no hard and fast plan in God's mind, only possibility; Love being the guiding premise that is being improvised amid the random unfolding of the universe. This theology is most present in the mystic traditions among many religions around the world.

I have of course over-simplified... but all three of these theologies have ample warrant in the Bible, in both Hebrew scripture and New Testament literature. Sometimes they overlap. Sometimes they actually compete for attention... So I want to suggest today that even though Theism is what most of us grew up with, and were taught in Sunday school... I want to suggest that the theologies of liberation and process speak more eloquently of a God who is present in creation. In both of these theologies God's love is contingent to the choices of those who follow God... that is, God's love depends on the people with whom God is in radical partnership. That is what Incarnation is... Jesus being the archetype of the human community... Incarnation means that Love requires flesh

and blood... Think the elements of the Eucharist; flesh and blood; our life and labor, blessed, broken, and given for the world... Love requires flesh and blood... and flesh and blood are process, and change, and transformation, and contingency, and inter-dependance..... and real.

So here's another question: What if God is process; what if God is not a discreet being wholly apart from us, but that God is the very process of becoming in which we live and move and have our being? What if this promised kingdom of God is not some utopian dream... some future hope, or some reward in the next life. What if God's kingdom were the here and now, just as the world is... the here and now in all of its complexity, and uncertainty... that suffering and joy, both, were rudiments of the kingdom of God. What if the gospels are clues as to how to live in the kingdom as it is, in all of its terror and beauty... What if our life as the baptized is not to bring about the kingdom of God, but to practice the art of Love within its vast complexity?

That is what I believe the gospel of Mark is about. Mark's theology is decidedly process: How to live in the kingdom of God that is here and now; immediate, as Mark puts it... so speculate with me with regard to the passage we just read. "The kingdom of God is" Not the kingdom will be... but the kingdom

of God is “as if” someone would scatter seed on the ground... as if, that’s subjunctive. A hypothetical, a possibility... the kingdom of God is the process, possibly, if we so choose of scattering seeds.... The ends are not the thing; the future is not the thing. God’s kingdom is about the means of love. God is in the process. God is the process.... The seeds of course are acts of love... Love that even in small seemingly mundane acts, produces the fruits of dignity and well-being. Love ramifies. Love changes things. Love is all we have to give. Could it be that our singular vocation as the baptized is to stand in the midst of this ambiguous and complicated life... a life of random contingency... a life of infinite possibility... and bring Love to bear, and therefore redeem and reconcile the whole of it? Do you believe that Love is that which enables God to call the whole of creation good, in spite of all the contingencies that would undermine our common life? If you do, then I have a request of you as a priest of the church. I want you to choose to be in the process.

We have, as you no doubt know, a catastrophe on our hands... a catastrophe in the kingdom of God. Immigrant children are being separated from their parents and detained in camps... soon to be tent cities. Our own government is using terror to deter people, families, from pursuing a life of dignity among us. Such terror will scar these children forever. It has to stop. We say in our

confession, “forgive us for the evil done on our behalf... well, this is evil done on behalf of you and me. I don’t have to remind you that scripture compels us to welcome the stranger; to treat the resident alien as we would wish to be treated. If we the church fail to act, then our faith is a mockery. If not us... we who believe in the transforming power of Love... If not us then who? My request is this: Please call your congressman and senators and encourage them to stop this immoral, outrageous, and unacceptable policy. We are told that phone calls to legislators are the most expedient means of influence. If we the church are not a part of the process of our common life, then who sets the moral standard? The days of the church being seen and not heard have to end. The days of faith being a private matter must end. We need to be activists for Love. That is what seed planting is all about.... The process requires our enlightened participation. Give yourself to the process that is God at work creating a just world still... a world full of possibility still becoming; a world in which life’s abundance is meant for all... Be the flesh and blood blessed, broken, and given for the world’s nurture and its transformation.

Brothers and sisters, I believe with all my heart that God is among us, making all things new...That God is Love; but Love requires flesh and blood...Good

people, Be God's flesh and blood so that Love moves beyond "as if". Let's not allow Love to be a hypothetical, a mere possibility.... Make it real.