

Not Gods -- Christmas Eve 2019

For God so loved the world. So great was God's love and concern that the most radical step possible was the astonishing and wondrous one of having a full and intimate relationship with the rest of Creation. God decided to move in, to live together, to marry... us.

In truth, God was already in full communion and intimacy with all the rest of Creation, having brought everything into being. We get confused and wrangle with one another over God as some sort of character, a person-ality, because we want full understanding of everything, and the control that comes with it. Look at any legitimate news source to find out about the stunning amount of information that is being gathered by the instant from our telephones, our computers and from cameras everywhere. That information is used by people who want to control our spending, our votes, and our lawfulness, which make up a big part of our personalities. We are giving ourselves away.

This urge to know (and thus control) the personality of God has characterized humanity ever since we first crushed grapes. It is why the story of our being kicked out of The Garden of Eden arose: we ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. As the story goes, God was alarmed at the realization that, if we thought we knew everything, we might start thinking we would live forever too. Once that happened, we would think ourselves gods, and cease paying any attention to the Mystery that is at the Center of all Creation, the Source of all Power and Light. God so loved the world as to try to save us from ourselves; to steer us away from such a tragic and catastrophic error of judgement. Instead, most of human history is about efforts to prove God wrong.

Of course we are fascinated and gratified by the discoveries in medical research. Each of us has good reason to believe that built-in human problems -- flaws – can be fixed. There is scarcely a person in this room who has not survived or avoided some affliction that would have been fatal a few short decades ago. We are glad to be alive. We are grateful for medicine. But it doesn't make us gods.

Telomeres are the subject of many a dinner conversation. As I understand it, they are little info strips at the ends of our DNA that get used up as we age. Researchers have concluded that, if we can find a way to replenish them, we won't age. God is not, perhaps, nervous at this development, but it is safe to say that there is an amber light flashing in the great cockpit in the sky. See how easily one person who thinks he is clever can turn God into 'my co-pilot?'

On the subject of cockpits, Astronaut Scott Kelly, who spent a year in space, suffered numerous troublesome weakenings of his bodily systems during the mission, but one of the wonders they noted was lengthening of his telomeres. His body was falling apart, but he wasn't aging. This is how we know God has a sense of humor.

Kelly is in the process of what looks to be a full recovery from the physical ill-effects of his journey. A year is a long time, but he proved that being out in space that long would not kill someone. Physically. And it would only take a year to get to Mars. Of course Mars ain't the kind of place to raise your kids. In fact it's cold as hell. And there's no one there to raise them if you did. Now Pluto, so they say, would take around 9 years, 5 months and 25 days, give or take, to reach. So we might get there and be puddles of jelly in our cockpits – but not aging!

These are the projects that some of our most gifted scientists and talented moviemakers are working on simultaneously. But the answers they come up with will never make us gods.

Creation has not had any trouble with anything besides humanity. All other elements have ebbed and flowed, lived and died, been formed and transformed without raising a stink about it, or trying to escape its processes. But we have tried to understand them so fully as to control them ourselves. Not content with being in charge of our own communities, nor all that successful in running them, we want to control Creation.

But we cannot do that. We have resisted, often to the death, the one fact -- or mindset -- that would bring sure success to our stewardship of the World: 'We are not gods, and never will be.' This is why our lives are unmanageable. Nothing can change until the people who get this outwit the people who don't. In AA, folks say they got better because they "came to believe that (only) a power greater than ourselves could restore (them) to sanity." Richard Rohr calls for an "incarnational worldview," that is the profound awareness of the presence of the divine in literally 'every thing and every one,' not just humans. Understanding that is the key to mental and spiritual health, as well as to basic contentment and happiness. Not to mention World Peace.

The mysterious power behind Creation is a universal truth, not a cosmic superstar to compete with. Tonight of all nights, we welcome one another with prayers, affection, food and presents, we think about the love and beauty we have seen and felt, and perhaps we recall and mourn again our sorrows for a time. Tonight we would do well to remember, with J.B. Phillips, that God's insertion into human history was achieved with an almost frightening quietness and humility. There was no

special privilege and no special effects. The physical entry of God into God's own world was almost heartbreakingly humble. In sober fact, there is little romance or beauty in the thought of a young woman looking desperately for a place where she could give birth to her first baby.

Rohr goes on: "Christians believe that the universal presence we call God was 'born of a woman under the law' (Galatians 4:4) in a moment of chronological time. This is the great Christian leap of faith (which we understand not everyone is willing to make.) Nevertheless, we daringly believe that God's presence was poured into a single human being, so that humanity and divinity are seen to be operating as one; in him—and therefore in us! Instead of saying that God came into the world through Jesus, maybe it would be better to say that Jesus came out of an already Christ-soaked world. The second Incarnation flowed out of the first, out of God's loving union with physical creation."

The World is not having trouble with the rocks, or the fish, or the trees. The World, that is the whole of everything that is in God's hands, is only having trouble with humankind. We are the only beings that can't get along. So God has shown us how to do it better; has role-played it for us, in the the best of all senses.

The story goes around of a pediatric ward nurse who always offered to let kids listen to their own heartbeats. Their eyes would light up with awe, and they would say sweet and funny things. By far her favorite response came from a 4 year-old named David: Tucking the stethoscope into his ears, the nurse said, "what do you suppose that sound is?" He thought for a moment about the strange Boom-boom, Boom-boom, then his face broke out in a grin: "That's Jesus knocking."

This beautiful night, we celebrate the night God came knocking at our door. And we renew our sometimes dubious, often fragile, but vital and deeply loved awareness that we can see God in each other. Certainly, it is easier to think about the sun that warms us, the innumerable beauty of the stars and the flowers we will soon see on the desert plains. Glorious green hillsides and magnificent white wavebreaks are good for the spirit. All these constitute convincing evidence that God's Creation is beyond our understanding.

Our challenge and our vocation is to learn how to see that beauty and uncontrollability called Creation in one another -- in Jesus, in our mirrors, in each other. What God has done in Jesus is to be our companion and guide as we recover from the awful affliction we keep contracting, whose primary symptom is forgetting we are not in control of Creation; we are not God. As Dorothy Day once said, "There are wars and rumors of wars, poverty and plague, hunger and pain. Still, the sap is rising, again there will be the resurrection of spring, and once more God's Christmas promise to be with us always, with comfort and joy, if we will only ask.