

“God of The Living”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages
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Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21 (CEV)

Luke 20:27-38(RSV)

‘You are wonderful, Lord, and you deserve all praise,
because you are much greater than anyone can understand.’ Psa. 145:3(CEV)

Let us pray... O God,

Help us remember you are a living God – you are present even when we forget.

Help us to make room for you in our minds and our lives
to call upon you, to thank you, and to praise you.

Amen

Though the Psalms are usually in the form of a hymn addressed to God,
today’s scripture reading from Psalm 145 talks about God.

Usually, our worship on Sunday is oriented on praising and serving God,
but not so much about God.

Perhaps this is because any effort to put God in some kind of perspective is futile,
because we just can’t imagine what any limits would be.

Consider how a certain person was taking it easy, lying on the grass
and looking up at the clouds, she started to imagine shapes
like giant Macy’s balloons.

This made her think of God, and so she decided to talk to God, saying,
"God, how long is a million years to you?"

Sure enough, God answered her, saying,

"In my frame of reference, it's about a minute."

Then she asked,

"God, how much is a million dollars to you?"

God answered,

"To me, it's a dime."

So, she asked,

"God, can I have a dime?"

And God said,

"In a minute."

<http://www.jokeswarehouse.com/cgi-bin/viewjoke2.cgi?id=20070629>

Every so often, I like to talk to you about God –

just to keep us connected with why we go to church on Sunday

and what going to church can mean for us the rest of the week.

We should be refreshed and renewed,

but also challenged to open up more, to learn more, and to serve more...

Willard, p.2

Here at UCC at The Villages,

our worship liturgy, prayers, and message are most often about
our human joys and concerns as something we lift up
to praise God and seek God's attention and help.

This is as much about goals for justice and peace
as well as individual healing and salvation.

Sunday to Sunday,

I am inclined to speak about God's Kingdom of Heaven in terms of
a Beloved Community that is possible as a social reality,
like a conservative Christian would speak about the Body of Christ.

Making that connection between God and concern for the world we live in
through Christ is what made 'Church' real for me.

I went from service in the military to serving God –
and the continuous thread is 'service'.

It is important to remember, though, that the Church is not a social service agency
no more than it should be an entertainment center.

Yet Church can and should be a place for you to help make this a better world
and to be caught up in awe of the beauty that God has put in this world
and promised for the next.

God expects us to work and play 'in the fields of the Lord' –
and part of the work and play in a service of worship is to sing...

Contemporary Christian music is characterized as praise music
much like the Psalms themselves – even echoing the Psalms
speaking about God's attributes as metaphors.

For example here's an Amy Grant song that is now a classic:

R: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet; And a light unto my path.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet; And a light unto my path.

V 1: When I feel afraid, And think I've lost my way.

Still, You're there right beside me.

Nothing will I fear; As long as You are near;

Please be near me to the end.

http://www.lyricsfreak.com/a/amy+grant/thy+word_20007722.html

Willard, p.3

Classic hymns are this way, too, speaking in metaphors;
For example:

*Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

*Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

http://www.hymnlyrics.org/mostpopularhymns/be_thou_my_vision.php

‘Thy Word’ and ‘Thou my best thought’ touch on God’s attributes,
but we never quite come up with a box big enough for God
nor fully grasp a starting point for that matter,
to definitively describe who or what God is.
God always remains in many ways a Great Mystery.

Nevertheless, we human beings make some claims about God –
for us as Christians, God is a Trinity,
but for Jews and Muslims, such a claim goes against their
belief in the oneness of God as God alone.
as in the Jewish Shema,
‘Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD’,
and the Muslim Shahada,
‘There is no god but God, and Mohammed is his prophet.’

I have admired the beautiful prayers that come from
the Jewish and Muslim traditions which rely on metaphors about God.
We have Christ – through whom we have a glimpse
of God’s character and teachings.
Our prayer and music traditions reflect imagery about Jesus
as a way of celebrating and lamenting as God’s people,
and teaching about God.

Wars have been fought over God – or rather how people interpret God.
It’s too bad we don’t take the part about ‘love’ more seriously.
Jesus was all about love and as it says in 1st John chapter 4,
“God is love” – so Jesus was all about God.

Willard, p.4

Our keynote speaker at the Florida Conference Bi-Annual meeting yesterday was Ron Buford – who developed the ‘God is still speaking’ initiative for the United Church of Christ, and he said,

‘Jesus is the clue’ about who God is.

He also said he really dislikes that bumper-sticker slogan,

‘Jesus is The Answer’.

Instead, he prefers to say,

‘Jesus is The Question’ –

‘Christ is The Question to explore the “I AM-ness” of God.’

Ron emphasized several times, the ‘I AM-ness’ of God –

a reference to Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush,

when Moses asked, ‘Who shall I say sent me?’

and God answered, “Tell them “I AM sent you...”

Ron Buford says that somewhere along the way,

we lost the sense of God’s ‘I AM-ness’.

Instead, we have insulated ourselves with

dogma, tradition, and all kinds of cultural habits

that keep us from recognizing that God is a God of the living –

now and in the time to come.

Rather than something static, God and

our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is dynamic.

God is a living being and we have the Gospel stories of the life of Jesus

as our example for what that means.

Ron Buford says – and I’m paraphrasing,

that not only is this living God still speaking,

but God is still creating things into existence;

God never stopped creating;

and ‘God still stoops [down] to re-create’.

We are created in the image of God’s ‘I AM-ness’

and in the midst of becoming who we were created to be,

no matter where we are in that process –

wherever we are on our life’s journey,

God welcomes us and as people of God, we should do the same.

Ron Buford is a contributing writer to the UCC’s

‘Stillspeaking’ online devotional, and it so happens that

one that he wrote was sent out last week.

Willard, p.5

Referring to 1 Peter 1:3-9, Ron Buford writes:

*...our faith in God is imperishable, undefiled, unfading,
and is kept outside of the present time, space, cause and effect continuum,
existing instead in God's eternal present
where it never becomes obsolete.*

Our relationship with God cannot be severed...

God's 'eternal presence' is God's 'I AM-ness'
and when things fall apart because of death,
or the breaking up of a relationship, or illness –
it is in such times, Ron Buford said,
that 'only the I AM-ness of God will do'.

Ron Buford concluded his Stillspeaking meditation with a hymn as a prayer:
*... [B]lessed assurance, Jesus is mine / Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine /
Heir of salvation / Purchased of God /
Born in God's Spirit, Lost in God's love.
Amen*

*5 Our scripture lesson from Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21
is a song of praise, celebrating the goodness and mercy of God
and the eternal relationship we have with God...*

1 I will praise you, my God and King, and always honor your name.

2 I will praise you each day and always honor your name.

3 You are wonderful, Lord, and you deserve all praise,
because you are much greater than anyone can understand.

4 Each generation will announce to the next your wonderful and powerful deeds.

5 I will keep thinking about your marvelous glory and your mighty miracles.

17 Our Lord, everything you do is kind and thoughtful,

18 and you are near to everyone whose prayers are sincere.

19 You satisfy the desires of all your worshipers,
and you come to save them when they ask for help.

20 You take care of everyone who loves you,
but you destroy the wicked.

21 I will praise you, Lord, and everyone will respect your holy name forever.

Luke 20:27-38

[27] There came to him some Sadducees,

those who say that there is no resurrection,

[28] and they asked him a question, saying,

"Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies,

having a wife but no children, the man must take the wife

and raise up children for his brother.

[29] Now there were seven brothers;

the first took a wife, and died without children;

[30] and the second [31] and the third took her,

and likewise all seven left no children and died.

[32] Afterward the woman also died.

[33] In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?

For the seven had her as wife."

[34] And Jesus said to them,

"The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage;

[35] but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age

and to the resurrection from the dead

neither marry nor are given in marriage,

[36] for they cannot die any more,

because they are equal to angels

and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

[37] But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed,

in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord

the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

[38] Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him."