

Is Your God too Small?

[Luke 20:27-38](#)

Let's begin with a riddle.

Picture this scene: There was a car wreck.

It was the fault of a man in a small car
who darted out in front of a big car
causing the big car to crash through a store window.

The people in the small car were not hurt.

In the big car there was one person injured and one person dead.
A manslaughter charge was never filed against the driver
Of the small car.

Why was the charge not filed? Anyone have an idea?

THE BIG CAR WAS A HEARSE!!!
THE DEAD PERSON WAS DEAD BEFORE THE ACCIDENT!!!

Death is certainly not funny,

But to help us deal with the reality of death
We certainly have lots of funny stories,
Jokes, riddles, cartoons.

There was another just the other day in the comics

With Peter at the pearly gates, book open, feather pen in hand...
Man standing there hoping to get in...
Peter says: "Now give me your username and password one more time....."

I stopped counting at 480 images of pearly gate cartoons
After searching for "Peter at the Pearly gates" with Goggle.

We have lots of questions regarding death, as did the Sadducees.

They didn't believe in any kind of life after death,
Yet they used the topic to try to stymy Jesus with a riddle of t day.

I recently read one of those blanket statements

That people in "so called authority" make.
This was from a priest:

“People grasp at life so stringently
That they resist learning at all how to die.”

When I read the statement, my immediate response was:

“Can we really learn how to die.”

Certainly, we can learn from others how to prepare for death...
But that is not the same thing as teaching us how to die.

And maybe I’m being too literal here,
But I believe my thinking fits our gospel reading.

No one can teach us how to stop living.
Just as no one taught us how to be birthed, be born, begin living.
Birth and death happen
To each of us uniquely and alone
Except for the company of God
And the timing of God.

More to the essence of our gospel teaching is the idea that
What some of us resist is not so much learning how to die,
But learning how to live,
Leaning how to live into that abundant life
Intended for us by God.

During a catch-up phone conversation with Heather,
A pastor friend from Redding,
Heather asked if I recalled the woman in her congregation
That had a near death or life after death...
How ever you want to phrase it...experience.

The woman, her husband and another couple were out in the woods on a picnic,
Far from town. For fun, they had taken a horse and wagon.
The woman began hemorrhaging profusely
Literally bleeding to death.

She was placed in the back of the wagon and she says she died.
And she had that certain experience
You may have read or heard about:

The experience of being drawn to a bright white light,
Hands reaching out to lovingly enfold and embrace her.

She was given a choice to continue that journey
To the light...to God
Or to return.

Her choice is rather obvious. She returned.

But returned changed.

Living with that experience so deep a part of her
She was able to live without fear,
And in awe and acknowledgement of the reality of God's love.

This lady had a profound, positive, spiritual influence on Heather,
So that it was with much sadness and confusion
That Heather told me of her most recent visit to this lady.

Something changed drastically with the woman.

She is no longer ready to leave her dying in God's hands...

She wants to live to a certain time,

The time of God's final judgement as she perceives it is going to be,

Even though Jesus is clear time and again

That the final judgment is not ours to know

The when, where, how and why.

The lady told Heather that she is now looking forward to not her own death and resurrection and being in the presence of God, but she's looking forward to and hoping to see God's judgment. And for her that now means God's punishment; punishment of those others, all those others she labels as bad.

What a tragic shift....

As this woman grows closer to her own death

Her image of God shrinks smaller and smaller and smaller

As does the vibrant, loving spirit of life

That she once so whole heartedly lived and shared.

There is an exercise I've used on occasion called:

"Your God is too Small".

Which offers the following questions:

Is your God an "heirloom"? Second-hand? Passed down? Santa Claus God?

Is your God that "lovely old man", bearded, ancient-of-days God?

Is your God the "disappointing" God? The One you use to blame things on?

Is your God an Episcopalian?

Is your God too small?
Is your image of God limiting how fully you live?

Over and over again
These past weeks, months,
Parable, after parable,
Story after story
Including today....

Jesus is saying to the Sadducees, his followers, to us:
Don't imagine God so small
God so much like YOURSELVES!

What makes you think that heaven will have
The same boundaries that you put to your experiences here?
Stop building boundaries and walls
Trying to control the world
Trying to control God....

As one Bible commentator puts it:
"God is capable of anything.
God is infinite possibility,
Unending probability.

You might not understand.
You might not approve.
You probably think it's unfair.
And you might think it's just crazy.... this infinite possibility, unending probability

AND, you can argue all you want
Now and later
But that doesn't change God and the reality
That we should never, never underestimate God."

In my words, my thinking, my experience:
The larger, the more diverse our image of God,
The more fully we are apt to live
As God intended us to live.

Many years ago, I had a very unique and rare worship opportunity

attending a Kristallnacht Memorial Service
Co-sponsored by Congregation Beth Israel
And St. John's Episcopal Church
At St. John's in Chico, CA

The service remembers the beginning of the end
For so many Jews and others in the face
Of that destructive and deadly force of Nazism.

Kristallnacht means "night of the broken crystals."
The evening of Nov. 9, 1938
81 years ago, yesterday,
All the synagogues in Germany
Were filled with flame and smoke to the skies.

The churches next to them stood in darkness, safety, silence.
Glass littered the streets
From all the broken shop windows
Of the Jewish community.

The neighbors walked upon the crunching splinters
And were for the most part silent.
A few prayed.
A few churches courageously expressed their grief.

But a dark cloud of silence filled the world.

The story of that night was our beginning meditation
And the service continued with passages from Genesis and Psalm 22,
Narrations and readings
From personal journals of survivors,
Stories of those who tried to help,
And the lighting of candles
In memory of the six million persons who died.

Throughout the service,
Led by Christians and Jews,
I was moved by a deep sense of connectedness.

In the structure and tone of this Jewish service

Lay the roots of our liturgy,
Our worship this day...today, November 10, 2019.

And in their Hebrew scripture
Now also ours, as The Old Testament
We find myriad glimpses of the fullness of God;
An awesome variety of images

God the creator
God the man of war
God king and Lord

God the rock
God the shepherd

God, teacher, father
Maker and mender.

God, mother, giving birth, bringing forth life,

God as eagle and wind and spirit and wisdom.

God as the shaker of the heavens, and the earth and the sea and the dry land...and all nations

God, abiding spirit

God of all time and before time
Promise of presence

God of the impossible name.

I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE

God of the living.

As we came to the end of the Kristallnacht memorial service,
We recited words found on the wall
Of a cellar in Cologne, Germany
Where Jews hid from the Nazis.

The words form a creed:

I believe,
I believe in the sun
 Even when it is not shining.

I believe in love
 Even when feeling it not.

I believe in God
 Even when God is silent.

Even when God is silent,
 Especially when we perceive God as silent
 We are called to believe in God
 And as Christians to watch for the spark of new light in the dark...
 To watch for the spark of resurrection.

We must keep the diverse images of God before us...
 Not allow our God to get too small, to be made in our own image
 So we not grow silent....
 So that we continue to seek God's justice and peace
 For this world; God's creation, not ours.

That may or may not be learning how to die.
 But it is living,
 Living life fully
 As God intended us to live