

“Send Me”

Here is an easy question to begin your Sunday morning. Who is God and how would we know God if we met God? Of course we could go with the old stereotypes of God being some ancient dude who lives in the sky, sitting on a throne, and surrounded by choirs of angels singing praises. Perhaps we could go with Kevin Daly’s favorite movie image of a cigar chomping George Burns as God. Or if you have read the novel *The Shack* you might imagine God as a wise, middle-aged, black woman.

In today’s reading from Isaiah God does not quite fit into any one of these images. Indeed, Isaiah is too astounded to even notice anything personal about God except that God’s robes fill the court of the Temple. Presumably, God’s self is occupying the Holy of Holies and God’s robes keep Isaiah at a distance. Isaiah also notices that there are six-winged seraphim flying about and singing God’s praises.

This is enough for Isaiah to realize that he is in a whole lot of trouble. We know from the Book of Exodus that no one can see God and live. The people of Israel send Moses up Mt. Sinai alone figuring that meeting God on the mountain will be the end of him. Even his brother Aaron gives up and allows the people to make a golden calf figuring that worshipping a statue is safer than going up the mountain to look for Moses. They are more than a little surprised when Moses returns.

Later when Moses asks to see God, God tells him that he will have to wait for God to pass by. Moses ends up seeing only God’s back. For a human being to see God face-to-face is not safe. It is overwhelming, magnificent, and we cannot survive it.

Isaiah is very worried. As he tells us he is a “man of unclean lips” and comes from a “people of unclean lips.” If one as righteous as Moses would be doomed Isaiah knows he is done for. But God sends one of the seraphim who takes a coal from the altar to purify Isaiah’s lips. Thus when God asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah can respond, “Here am I; send me!”

It is interesting that whenever God calls someone to be a prophet they initially refuse. They all think they are unworthy to be God’s prophet. Perhaps that is the way it should be. If we think we are good enough to be a prophet we do not have the humility to serve God. Think of Moses when God calls from the burning bush, Moses says he is not good with words so God says he will make Aaron Moses’ mouthpiece. When Ezekiel says he is not good enough God force feeds him a scroll so that the word of God is within him. Even Jesus when called by God goes into the wilderness for forty days in order to figure it out, and he is the Son of God. When I perceived a call to ministry I prayed on it for three years before mentioning it to anyone. I thought that God could not possibly mean me “the unkind the ungrateful.”¹

Encountering God is not easy; especially if we are aware of our faults and failings. Then we know that to approach our creator is fraught. To complicate things we have the confusing theological construct of the Trinity—God one in three and three in one. Almost every explanation of the Trinity that I have heard or read that made any sense whatsoever was in some way or another a heresy. Overall I think it is a theological concept best left to the theologians when they take a break from arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.

¹ From “Love” (III) by George Herbert.

I think that if we keep our eyes, ears, minds and hearts open we encounter God in many ways. Many people say they encounter the divine in nature, or in music, or in art. We can also encounter God in the written word whether it is scripture, poetry or other writing. We also encounter God in our worship, in our prayers, songs, and the sacraments. We encounter God in other people who care for us, share with us, love us, and hold us, as well as in those we love and care for.

God is a multiplicity of encounters because God pervades everything. God is even in those things that we perceive as bad. Not because God makes bad things happen, but because God cannot be blocked out by evil. God is in the most evil of things accompanying the wounded, the damaged, the murdered in their sorrow and pain. God does not leave us abandoned no matter how alone we may feel.

God simply is. If we ever doubted God's presence, God decided to manifest the divine in Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, we know that God is with us—Emmanuel for all time. What's more Jesus' life, death and resurrection made it so that we, unlike Isaiah, have nothing to fear in the presence of God. As our Eucharistic liturgy states,

“In [Jesus], you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.”

However we may understand or not understand the Trinity we have been redeemed by the precious love and care of the persons of the Trinity. Our sins have been expunged and our lives are made whole even as we a people of unclean lips break the wholeness again and again whether intentionally or out of our ignorance or self-aggrandizement.

God loves this world. I must admit that sometimes I do not know how. God has not given up on us. Perhaps it is like in Genesis where God agrees to Abraham's request not to destroy Sodom as long as there are ten good people there. Likewise God thinks it is worth giving us a chance to get it right as long as some are trying.

Let us each ask for the coal that cleanses our lips. Let us each speak only the words that God give us, taking time to discern and to listen. Let each of us decide to be one of those who serve God as God needs us and calls us to do. We may not be able to offer a sound definition of the Trinity, but we can faithfully answer God's call, “Here am I; send me.”