

Easter VII Year C 2025

Each year in the Fall I lead the Rector's Forum. It's a class/conversation principally for those preparing for Confirmation or reception... joining the Episcopal Church; but it's also open to those who want something of a refresher course in church history, on the Book of Common Prayer... why we do the things we do in the Episcopal Church; the authority of scripture; how the bible came to be... and then it's open to questions of any kind... questions on your mind. One of the units in this six weeks course, is what I've coined as the "three great theologies." To be sure, you can dig up many more theological speculations in the bible, differing, sometimes opposing, points of view, but by and large the theology of the bible falls, I propose, into three categories. All three have warrant over the course of both Hebrew scripture, and the New Testament. Sometimes they oppose each other; sometimes they intertwine. All theology is provisional; all our imaginative speculations.

The first, and the most commonly embraced by the church (and by church I mean Christendom, the church universal) the first is theism. Theism proposes that there is one God, male, who lives in the heavens, keeping his distance, as it were, from the sinful world. This God is the king of the universe... he is all knowing, all powerful, unchanging. Though he loves us, He sits in judgement of the people he created, and decides whether they are worthy of heaven or of hell. Some of the more progressive theists have decided that this God is a universalist; that he is drawing the creation entire to himself; that over time somehow he got over his judgementalism... but still this depiction of God is that he

is aloof, distant, only to enter the created order on special occasions. This God is safe; because this God tends to mind his own business. Now, I'm being a little smug here, but this, though over-simplified, is the God of the church, certainly in the first world of the west. This is the theology, more or less, that we were all taught as children. We say that Jesus was God on earth, but then we celebrate at the feast of the Ascension Jesus's return to heaven after his resurrection, as if perhaps he decided he would work from home with his dad.

The second great theology is that of Liberation. The exodus of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt is its touchstone. This theology proposes that God is first and foremost about the liberation of God's people from oppression. It acknowledges that the powerful lord their power over the powerless. It is an expression of God's solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. In the New Testament, in the Gospel of Luke, Mary's song is quintessential liberation theology.... "The poor raised up, and the rich sent empty away." In the twentieth century liberation theology came into its own in the global South, the so-called two thirds world... as a response and resistance against Western imperialism. Many clergy who embraced this theology, particularly in the Roman Church, were excommunicated because they were considered by the church hierarchy to be Marxist. Liberation Theology makes the life of God intensely political, that is to say, concerned with matters of the common good... that faith is no longer a private matter, but that faith becomes a matter of public advocacy.

The third, and less recognizable theology in scripture is Process. Process Theology recognizes that the world, and our lives in it are all about change and transformation... and if the natural world and humankind are reflections of God then God is about change and transformation as well. Process theology stands against the notion that God is unchanging, always the same. Process holds that God inhabits the world, and as the world changes and evolves, God changes and evolves. God learns, as it were; God can be surprised. God questions. Process Theology is not about a destination; it is about the journey. Love, God's predisposition, is not an end, but a process, a way of living. Compassion is a process, knowledge is a process, not an arrival at some profound truth. Truth is a process, ever unfolding. God inhabits the process as God inhabits the earth and our very souls. This God doesn't have a plan; but is imaginatively improvising creation into being; taking risks. The vaunted Kingdom of God, the promised finale of time and space, is not an end but process. The kingdom of God is forever becoming, an ongoing vocation of creativity, and we are co-creators with God in this glorious, and terrifying process. This God isn't safe; but this God is true and good and faithful.

Throughout Holy Scripture there is a decided and persistent tension between the God who is other, and distant... and the awareness that God is with the people God loves. Love can't love from a distance. Theism came about at the emergence of empire, an hierarchical system, ruled by a king... and the concept of God took on that projection. Theism falls way short in speaking of God as Emmanuel, God with us. Liberation theology as well as Process speak of a God who inhabits God's creation, and a God who

is in solidarity with God's people. For the liberation theologians God is leading the resistance against power gone wrong... setting God's people free, and building a beloved community. In Process, we are of the stuff of God, primeval substance of the big bang, It verges on Pantheism, which considers all things God. In Process theology God's ego and ours are juxtaposed... and if we are aware and honest and present we can move mountains; we become the very Love and life of God for the world.

A theology of process is at the very heart of John's Gospel; that as Jesus was present with God in the beginning, so were God's people, evolving as God evolves. In the brief passage we just read John captures the essence of his premise... that he is in God, and God is in him.... And we too, we who receive God's Word are no less in God than is the Son... In Jesus's prayer for his disciples, he says, "The glory bestowed by you upon me, I give to my disciples" ...who are sent into the world as he is sent... a colony of angels, not fallen, but made of God, and empowered to do God's work; to be about the process of redemption; the process of Love.

So here's the thing. There is no resolution, no conclusion in the life of faith. If God were going to fix things, God would have done it by now. We, in intimate communion with God, one in the Spirit, are about the process of Love. Jesus uses a number of metaphors representing the process.... "I am the vine.... I am nurture.... I am befriender." And those metaphors are ours as well. We live in a cruel and chaotic world owing to greed and power. That will never change. But we stand for Love, compassion, and

justice. We only have to observe the treasonous occupation of our democracy to see what we are up against; what humankind has always been up against. It has to be a thorn in the side of a tyrant to feel the presence of love and good will and care in the midst of their vainglorious tyranny. That is our sacred call in these times. Ours is to witness to the presence of Love in the midst of such chaos and cruelty. Our very befriending, our care for our neighbor; our giving up our lives for the good of the cause of truth is enough to witness, at least to the presence of possibility. And God is all about possibility. Don't ever think your faith is not enough. Don't dwell on resolution. There is no final, concluding act in the drama of life. Love is enough. And love will never die. Love will bear fruit beyond our knowing; and Love will keep hope alive, for us, and for the ones we befriend. The kingdom of God is now. The 'kin-dom' of God is now. The beloved community of God is at hand. Let us be about that glorious process, and may possibility abound.