

Proper 12 Year A 2026

There is a fascinating book written in 1995 by a Jesuit scholar and biblical commentator named Jack Miles entitled, *God, a Biography*. The premise of the book is that Hebrew Scripture, and New Testament literature is one epic story about the life of God. That is to say, that God is the protagonist, the central character of the bible. And what makes this so-called biography fascinating is that it is not a story so much about God revealing Godself, but it is a story about God's own development, if you will... development as the Deity. Relying on scripture, verse by verse, Miles shows us God in the guise of an heroic literary figure, struggling at times with God's own identity. The God Miles describes to us is a warrior whose greatest battle is perhaps within Godself. We see God torn by conflicting urges. To God's own sorrow and regret and joy, God is by turns both destructive and creative, vain, modest, subtle and naïve, ruthless and tender, lawful and lawless, powerful, yet powerless, omniscient and blind.... A projection, of course. We witness God's perilous passage, God's own transformation, from power to Wisdom. God maturing.

As we watch God's very becoming, we are drawn into the epic drama of God's quest for self-knowledge, the search that prompted God to create

humankind in God's own image in the beginning.... A mirror by which God examines God's own reflection.

Alfred North Whitehead, in the early 20th century wrote a book entitled *Process and Reality* in which he argues that God, and therefore reality as a whole, is process... that God and therefore nature are not a quantifiable reality that we can reasonably know, or that can be contained in orthodox belief; but that God and nature are process, incomplete, still becoming; that God and nature are not defined by principle or dogma, but only apprehended, felt.... felt in the unfolding mystery that is process. That so resonates with me.

Jesus's teaching is all about how we consciously recognize that we are a part of the process. He taught that the entire tradition of Judaism hangs on the premise that to love our neighbor is to know and love God; that sacrifice for the good and the true, no matter the cost, is the means by which we participate in the life of God. For Plato, whose philosophy greatly influenced the writings of the New Testament scribes, the process is seeing to the well-being of our neighbor... doing justice, in short. They call it bearing fruit, the fruit of dignity, community, and justice. And there is no end to this process. There is no resolution, only the resolving.

So, a little context here for our reading in Matthew this morning. Matthew was written around the late 70's or early eighties of the Common Era, some forty years or so after the life and ministry of Jesus. Things have not resolved. The powerful Roman Empire still capriciously lords its power over the people. The Temple had been destroyed by the Roman army some ten years earlier; Palestine is governed by a violent and coercive police state. The disciples of Matthew's community are harried by suspicion and the threat of violence. Their hope for a life of freedom and dignity was surely called into question. Their morale was surely compromised. They wonder, I imagine, if their allegiance to the faith is all for naught. Matthew here is rallying this faithful remnant of the faith, imploring them not to give up hope.

Matthew rattles off five parables attributed to the teachings of Jesus. Each of these parables are contained in the Gospel of Thomas with which Matthew was likely familiar. The Gospel of Thomas, among other ancient Christian texts, was discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. This so-called Gospel doesn't contain a narrative storyline like the four Gospels of the bible. Instead it is a list of sayings attributed to Jesus. Scholars believe that this Gospel was written perhaps as early as the late thirties of the Common Era, making it contemporaneous with

the life and ministry of Jesus. In other words, these sayings may well have been spoken by Jesus himself.

All five of these parables speak of God's presence as process. The kingdom of God is like planting a tiny seed that grows into a giant shrub that provides shelter for the birds of the air. The kingdom of God is like one who makes bread, leavening it with yeast to make it rise. Loving God is like spending all that we have for the good of the cause. God's kingdom, that is to say, God's life in earth depends upon our unequivocal participation. The resolution of our labor is not for us to know; ours is to trust that our labors in the faith will bear fruit beyond our imagining. The word for faith in the Koine Greek is the same word for trust. We are to trust the process.

The point of Matthew's theological reverie is that the kingdom of God is effected, made visible, made present, by our doing... effected by the people of God acting with awareness and intention for the Gospel... planting seeds as it were... of welcome, mercy, compassion, and justice... living first and foremost for the greater good.... lives of sacrifice.

This is not magic of which Matthew speaks... there is nothing magical about God. I have long felt that God is not supernatural, whatever that word means...

but that God is radically natural. So Matthew is expressing his version of reality; describing the way of things... not a vision of a distant utopia... but the way the world actually works... that the world at its heart is about change and transformation, and that our sacrifice for the good and the true has exponential ramifications for a world living among the wheat and the weeds; between God's favor, and that which opposes it... vocation amid the complex and ambiguous juxtaposition between good and evil. That's where we live. Acts of Love, this writer argues, will bear fruit beyond our knowing, in spite of the world's brokenness.... Such acts of Love, he proclaims, will inform, influence a changing world... and such acts bear witness to the immutable fact that Love is alive... and where there is Love there is abiding hope. My brothers and sisters, in the face of a world gone mad, in the face of our persistent foe of corrupted power, there is hope... because change and transformation is the way of the world; a world of endings and beginnings... and we, good people, we the people of faith, bring Love to the process. And Love ramifies in the fertile soil of ruin and despair.

To the question ever on our lips these days... "What shall we do? What can we do?" We love the people given us... we pray for our enemies... we forgive. It might be so simple as giving a mere drink of water. Our vocation is that we are witnesses by our doing, witnesses to the presence of Love in the world... Love that

never dies; love that persists; Love that engenders a shred of welcome, a shred of justice, a shred of hope to an ambiguous, but beautifully mysterious world.

Matthew's proclamation is that small acts of Love, acts as mundane as planting a seed, or leavening bread... that small acts of Love are not small, but resound amid the music of the universe entire... God's improvised song of creation, still in its becoming. Perhaps ours is to bring a moment of harmony to the song... a harmony that the world cannot, dare not, resist.