Luke 13:31-35

*Psalm 27 Dominus illuminati*

Second Sunday in Lent

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How do you see God?

I have recently reconnected with an old friend via Linked In. This person is articulate - a professor at a university and grew up in what I would describe as a conservative, southern evangelical Christian home. Church every Sunday. In college he pursued theology and comparative religions and he recently shared that he “had come to the conclusion that religion does not help most people and in fact makes some people decidedly worse.”

I am not sure that I necessarily disagree with him on that, where he and I diverge as I do not tend to focus or think on “religion” per se, but I try to focus on God and being in a relationship with God, and when I think of “religion” I think in terms of how religion is the tool that helps me to be closer God. I use my “religion” to help me in my relationship with God.

Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, two professors from Baylor University wrote a book entitled *“America’s Four Gods: What We Say About God & What That Says About Us”.* The book was based on a 2008 poll where American’s were surveyed concerning their view of God, and how people viewed God was a strong predictor of a range of social and moral attitudes.

What they came up with was four images, or four basic concepts of how people generally view God. The first image was an image of an Authoritative God, a god that is very judgmental but also very engaged in the world at the same time. A majority of those who viewed God as this way were both evangelical and male.

The next group viewed God as a “Benevolent God”, who thoroughly involved in their lives, is loving and not stern. Most of these were evangelical women. This God answers the prayers of the suffering.

The next were those who viewed God as critical. Less likely to be concerned with moments in the lives of individuals, and who will hand out judgments in the next life. This was a popular image among those who are poor and oppressed.

The fourth and final way that God was viewed according to those who were surveyed, was that of a distant God, who set the universe in motion but then disengaged. This God is not involved in the day-to-day events or movements in ones life.

"These tend to be higher educated, more 'spiritual' people," said Froese.

Froese and Bader argued that such questions are not merely academic. They claimed that the way a person views God profoundly impacts one's morals, behavior and politics.

For example, President George W. Bush's talk of evil is more likely to resonate in believers in an engaged, judgmental God.

"My administration has a job to do and we're going to do it.," Bush said in an interview with CNN shortly after Sept. 11. "We will rid the world of the evildoers"

They also are more likely to view natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina as God's punishment.

Believers in a distant God are apt to be less suspicious of science and more likely to agree with Benjamin Franklin's assertion that a "supremely perfect" God doesn't care one bit "for such an inconsiderable nothing as man."

"A person's conception of God is central to how they perceive their world and behave in it," said Froese.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Whether we agree or disagree with their classifications, the point being that how we see and view God does profoundly impact our lives. It affects our perception of things and how we make sense of things, for good or bad. It can affect how we behave.

Today’s Gospel text, for the 2nd Sunday of Lent places us once again in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is heading squarely for Jerusalem in this text, and the Pharisees we are told warn Jesus to “get away, for Herod wants to kill you.” Jesus’ response is pretty much, “Tell that fox for me I am busy…” .

Herod is described by Jesus, as a fox - an image of slickness and slyness. Jesus, in responding to Herod’s desire to kill him shares (in referencing Jerusalem) “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”

This image of Herod as a fox is worth thinking on, and then the image of God as a “hen gathering her brood under her wings.”

An image of God as a mother hen caring for her children, wanting and desiring to protect them.

We all carry our own images of God around with us. We latch on to a story that maybe deeply impacted us when were younger at Vacation Bible school or somewhere in church - or perhaps something our mother or father said, more than likely a combination of factors has influenced how we see, view and experience God. Our images of God are wrapped up in biblical stories, personal experiences, and things we have absorbed from others, along with liturgy and a host of other things.

I suspect that not many of us have contemplated this image of God as a mother hen caring for her children, “gathering her brood under her wings.”

The Psalm today (Psalm 27) also gives us several images of God.

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?”*

*“The Lord is the strength of my life…”*

*“In the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his shelter…”*

*“You have been my helper…”*

*“Though my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will sustain me…”*

*“…tarry and wait, he shall comfort your heart…”*

My friend is not wrong when he says “that religion does not help most people, in fact, it can make them decidedly worse.” It can. It often does.

What can change and impact us though, is our relationship with God. God can and has been depicted so many ways by so many people. A world trying to make sense of things around them and why things are happening. A world seeking to make meaning.

When we are in relationship with someone, we get to know them somewhat intimately. We may not know everything about them ever, but we learn them and how they act in certain situations, things they like and don’t like, what they like to eat, where they put their shoes, etc. We observe them over time and we decide if this is someone we want in our lives on a more intimate basis or not. We listen to what others say about them. We watch how they respond to things.

We learn about God in through stories in the Bible. We listen and observe the natural world around us. We listen to science as we learn more about this world. We listen to others share stories of their experiences of God in their lives. We glean these (hopefully) from all different places and sorts of people. And then we gather them together and form this image of God for ourselves and how God interacts in the world and with us, and it impacts us. And we in turn carry that into the world in which live.

I am comforted by this image of Jesus/God desiring to gather the children of Jerusalem under her wings. I take this image and I put it with other images as I continue to formulate and grow in my relationship with God. It is certainly not the only image I have of God, and just like with anyone, we take all of those images and we formulate their personhood.

For the people of Ukraine. For those struggling to put gas and food in their cars this week, for each of us as we hurt and struggle and maybe sometimes feel alone, may this image of God, as a mother hen, be one that we claim this week.

Amen.

1. https://abcnews.go.com/WN/book-religion-examines-ways-americans-perceive-god/story?id=11825319 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)