



“God is the map whereby we locate the setting of our life. That God is the water in which we launch our life raft. That God is the real thing from which and toward which we receive our being and identify ourselves. It follows that the kind of God at work in your life will determine the shape and quality and risk at the center of your existence. It matters who God is.”¹

That quote is from an interview that Walter Brueggemann had with Krista Tipper, the host of “On Being.” Walter Brueggemann is a renowned professor emeritus at a seminary in Georgia and has written and spoken for many years about theology and especially about the prophets. This quote from that interview spoke to me when we consider the Gospel passage today.

It takes place after the resurrection and once again Jesus shows himself to the disciples. They have had the conversations with Jesus in the upper room and Thomas has seen the still wounded hands and feet and sides of Jesus. And, in some ways as if nothing had happened, the disciples go fishing. Perhaps it was an attempt to return to normality – after great tragedy and baffling conversations with a risen Lord, the disciples may have needed to return to what they knew: fishing. Even seeing and talking with the risen Lord had not made clear to them the way forward. And so they return to what they know: fishing. But Jesus isn’t through with them – or with us.

After a frustrating night of no fish, Jesus appears for a third time to the disciples. And, once again, they do not recognize who he is until he breaks bread and grills fish. Until Jesus provides food for them– literally and figuratively.

¹ Walter Brueggemann from interview with Krista Tippet: <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/conversations/current-conversation> (4/29/19)

Psalm 30; Acts 9: 1-20; Revelation 5: 11-14; John 21: 1-19

Now that the disciples have a full belly and have recognized Jesus among them once again, Jesus turns his attention to Peter. “Do you love me more than these?” meaning, I suppose, does Peter love Jesus more than Peter loves his fellow disciples. Where is Peter’s heart these days following the resurrection? And Peter’s answer is “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus continues: “Feed my lambs.” Perhaps to counter the three times that Peter denied Jesus, Jesus asks Peter the same question: do you love me? twice more. And twice more Peter replies “yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Three affirmations: “yes, Lord, you know that I love you” to counter the three denials. Jesus replies: Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Peter is being charged to lead and to care for the followers of Jesus, the sheep that now lack a physical Jesus as shepherd. It’s a reminder of what we read in the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus says: “...you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16: 18-19). Peter, the one who so often failed, is now redeemed and given a most important role in the ministry of spreading the gospel: the good news of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has forgiven Peter for all his human failings and for his denials on the night Jesus was betrayed. If Jesus can forgive Peter and can, in fact, give Peter the most important role of tending and feeding the sheep, then who are we to hold grudges and withhold our forgiveness to those who have wronged us? How can we not follow this example if we call ourselves disciples and followers of Jesus?

Notice that there is no blame game going on between Jesus and Peter. No shaming of Peter for his denial of Jesus. Rather, a loving acceptance and forgiveness and steps toward the future. This image of Jesus- of God- is one we should hold onto. Both know what happened and there isn’t any need to dwell on it. Peter has a choice. He can accept the forgiveness and the new charge or he can walk away. Accepting forgiveness, and putting his denials behind him, is not always an easy thing to do. Sometimes I want to hold on to my shame when I goof up because then I don’t have to look the one I’ve wronged in the face. I don’t have to truly face up to what I’ve done wrong. But without facing up to what I’ve done wrong, refusing to accept the forgiveness that Jesus offers, I hold onto my brokenness and it makes life even harder.

We know from later scripture and our history that Peter accepted the charge to build the church. To build a community that was known as “the way.” The one that Saul was persecuting until his Damascus Road experience. Paul’s own death and resurrection in a figurative sense. The change in Paul in understanding who God is and who Jesus was. An experience of the risen Lord that turned a life around – no blame or shame but rather love and forgiveness and a new charge to forth and tell the world about Jesus. The Damascus Road experience for Paul was a new map and a new setting for his life as he had gained a new understanding of who Jesus was.

Among my favorite passages in our Eucharistic Prayer C are these:

Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.

God is the source of our strength and the basis for our renewal. In good times and in challenging times, this table awaits us. As we prepare to accept the bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that “God is the map whereby we locate the setting of our life. That God is the water in which we launch our life raft. That God is the real thing from which and

toward which we receive our being and identify ourselves. It follows that the kind of God at work in your life will determine the shape and quality and risk at the center of your existence. It matters who God is.”²

One of the wonderful aspects of EFM, particularly years one and two when we read the Old and the New Testaments, is that it gives us the opportunity to explore in the group the kind of God at work in our lives and how those images and understandings of God do shape the quality of our lives. For me, and I suspect for all of you, my images and understanding of God have changed over the years as I have grown in faith and in my ability to discern more deeply what God may be trying to say to me. I fall back on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians in chapter 12, verse 13:

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

There is nothing wrong with seeing dimly at this point. It is part and parcel of being human. What matters is that we seek to know God and to live our lives loving God and loving neighbor. Perhaps Paul is telling us that we should not be afraid or ashamed that we don’t always understand what God is up to in our lives at this time. At the proper time all will be revealed to us. For now, though, we can rest assured that God is the real thing from which and in which “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Amen.

² Ibid.