

Easter 6 May 25, 2014  
Acts 17: 22-31  
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Scholar Marcus Borg writes: "From beginning to end, the Bible is the story of God...it is NOT God's story of God, rather the Hebrew Bible is ancient Israel's story of God and the new Testament is the early Christian movement's story of God, especially as revealed in Jesus."

How did these two ancient communities see the central character in their story? The Bible does **not** provide a simple answer to that question – yet through the ages our preachers and teachers have often tried to simplify it.

You know that place on I-5 where you are going north and a whole lot of lanes quickly narrow down into one or two before it branches back out again?

That is what the Church has often done with the varied and diverse images and experiences of God that are in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. For most of my growing up the Church gave me no other image of God but that of Father: the Big Guy with the beard that existed out and up there somewhere, far and away who might occasionally intervene.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century/Modern age of Christian history I would claim that this image of God became an idol. It became THE anthropomorphic description of God rather than a metaphor or an icon: an image that is meant to invite us into relationship **with** God/with the Holy Mystery.

Anything other than God the Father – a Norwegian looking father at that ---was discounted or even completely ignored and because many of us grew up with this image as the almost photographic description of God, some of us have found ourselves stuck or truncated in being open to the depth and breadth of God's relationship to the universe. Others have found the church irrelevant because it does not speak to their deeper experiences or needs.

Two weeks ago I referred to the lecture on the State of the Church which Scott and I attended with Diana Butler Bass and the Festival of Preaching Event which was about preaching to the post-modern world we live in: The message we received loud and clear was that today's seekers are NOT looking for a heady prescription or description of God but an experience of God, of the holy and in turn an affirmation that we are in a relationship with "it" in a meaningful way.

In the reading from Acts I am struck that Paul describes an image of God that did not originate in Hebrew scripture but from two Greek poets! Paul was attuned to his Greek audience and knew it would get their attention when he described the One God – the God who made the world and everything in it with words they would have heard before. In this great speech in Athens Paul describes God as the *“one in whom we live and move and have our being”*.

Theologian and author Paul Tillich who taught at Union Theological Seminary from 1933 to 1955 and is known as one of the most influential theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century used these words from Paul as a key Christian concept in his writings, he was considered quite a radical in his day. When I was in seminary and first read Paul Tillich’s description of God as *“the ground of all being”* I felt like my whole spiritual world exploded! I didn’t know this was right out of our New Testament! These words – this description of God as *“the ground of all being”* was the God I had experienced as a child when I would lie under the tree and feel the warm earth at my back and listen to the rustling of the leaves in the breeze. It described the experience of God I had when standing next to my mother on Sunday mornings while she sang the songs of our faith.

21<sup>st</sup> century scholar Marcus Borg, a self-described “Panentheist” also echoes these words from Paul as Borg experiences and describes God *“as the encompassing Spirit in whom everything that is, is. The universe is not separate from God but in God.”*

This week I found a beautiful poem written by Andrew King that also echoes the words of Paul and the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John as he describes his own experience of God: “And We In You” by Andrew King

**AND WE IN YOU by Andrew King**  
(John 14: 15-21)

As the tree is in the earth  
and the earth in the tree,  
as the sea is in the fish  
and the fish in the sea,

as the bird is in the air  
and the air in the bird,  
as word is in the breath  
and breath in the word,

as rhyme is in the music  
and music in rhyme,  
as time is in the season  
and the season in time,

as grief is in the loving  
and loving in grief,  
as belief is in the hope  
and hope in the belief,

as desire is in the will  
and the will in desire,  
as fire is in the flame  
and the flame in the fire,

as you, Christ, are in God  
and God is in you,  
so are you in us,  
and we in you.

So are you in us and  
we in you.

I am struck by the intimacy of this poem. God is not experienced here as a distant Father – a King far away and above creation that occasionally makes a Kingly visit. Andrew's experience of the God made known to him in Jesus introduces him to a God that is as intimate and near as breath.

It is so important for us as seekers of God – seekers of meaning and purpose and mystery – to become familiar with not just God the Father but the wide breadth and depth of images, metaphors and experiences the ancient people of Israel and the members of the early Christian movement had of God; of the Holy.

And it is important for us as a church to give room to one another to share our experiences of God – our own questions – and our own struggles, with experiences of God's absence.

Father – Mother – breath of life ---*experienced* in the touch of a grandchild or the voice of a friend – in the making of music, in feeding the hungry ---

As one author put it: “The whole world is God’s creation; it is the Playground of the Spirit”.

With this in mind, I would like us to sit in quiet for a minute or two and ask yourself this question: “When have I experienced God in my life?”

And if some of you might be willing to share I invite you to keep it brief and simply finish this sentence: “I experience God...”