

## What is not to love

### Introduction

When I first read through the readings for this Sunday, one section in particular struck me. Clearly you can guess what that was by just looking at the cover of our bulletin. What our religious ancestors, the Jews call the *SHEMA*, translated, *Hear O Israel* leapt out at me like Moses and the burning bush, or like Paul (then called Saul) on the road to Damascus, or Jesus as he wandered in the wilderness for forty days..facing the reality of what his baptism meant.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

*Hear , O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone (1) no issue here*

*You shall LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might (2) big issue here...LOVE God*

Leviticus 19:18

*You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (3) few issues here in fact I can expand that to love what God/Creator brought into being: from Maggie my dog to friends (warts and all) children (who are still improving...like Maxwell says: A mother never ceases to look at her middle aged children for signs of improvement)*

You see, I have experienced and suspect that for most of my life and maybe ours, more common for many of us to respect God, be in awe of God, need God, praise and thank god ...but LOVE God? That is like telling someone to “be spontaneous”...

Most of the time in church , we sing God’s praises but rarely are we singing so much about *loving* God! or being in a close “intimate” relationship with God. Oh yes, I have sung “What a friend we have in Jesus” but try on “What a friend we have in God...”

So today, briefly I want to look at our relationship with God/Yahweh/Adonai/Creator/Lord..and consider getting closer to recognizing God’s love for you, me, and all our relations (indigenous expression for ALL life)..and in turn feeling like we can be in an INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP to the Creator, one who you and I can trust, care about,

love...yet know that GOD is GOD and you and I are part of GOD's family...not visa versa...a paradox I know but that is life, eh?

Today we have before us three men who, based on Biblical texts. Moses, Paul and Jesus lived lives from what we know (from the Bible) that demonstrated in words and deeds that they were in a *close, intimate relationship with God*. I suspect we can say that Jesus loved God ,who he called Abba..Daddy and that Moses loved God ,even when he questioned God's judgment of how he could perform all the deeds he was called to in liberating the Israelites and Paul saw a different Lord after he had his "blinding flash" and heard the voice of Jesus asking him why he was persecuting him. Today we even hear Paul talk about being tender, like a nurse. He was a changed man by that encounter with the Divine.

But, I need to warn you that there are risks in getting into a relationship , an intimate relationship with the Divine just look at these three briefly:

(yes I know these are all men and all Jews)

they all had a close relationship to God,

they all were called by God for a particular mission (as each of us are if we listen)

they were all opposed and often violently

they all had difficulties with their own friends and followers (Jesus had problems with his family too)

they all travelled a lot (mainly on foot)

they all demonstrated a strong unwavering love for those they guided (tough love too)

they all did NOT live to see their mission fulfilled as they envisioned

they all passed their mantle on to others—leaving an active legacy

they were all moved in their hearts by the challenges facing those they were to liberate:

Moses: seeing his people in slavery

Paul seeing idolatry and moral corruption

Jesus seeing the pain and poverty of those he healed and taught.(caused by both the Roman conquerors and their own political and religious leaders)

So, there are risks getting close to God...you might find yourself moving, getting even more involved where you are, changing how you spend or use your time etc. etc. etc. Believe me, I know!

I always felt some empathy for Moses looking at the promised land but not being able to take those he had lead for forty years across the Jordan (finish line) but I have to admit there is no record of him grumbling, like I might have I thought he would.

A book of moving meditations I read recently helped me see this different. Richard Wagamese's last book titled *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*. It won the BC Book Prize this year, the year of his untimely death at 61!

He writes: *The single hardest lesson I've every had to learn is that the greater, grander plan is not mine to create or know. If I am in ceremony and prayer for the right reasons, I leave all that up to the Creator. When I surrender outcome, all things good and pure and peaceful come to me. My job is to choose what appears. Easy to say but hard to do, **to get our of the way enough to allow the energy (spirit) to flow.***

Like many here today, I am trying to figure out or make plans for whatever is next—even though I don't know what is next. (dilemma or paradox?) So, I have decided maybe it is best to just be ready for anything as much as I can. That inspired my recent experience last week at the Passport office. After turning in my form, the clerk asked me if I want to renew my passport of 5 years or 10. Without missing a heartbeat I said TEN YEARS. Then a thought entered my head :**you will be 79 next m month, are you sure you will want to travel after 85 needing a passport???**Well, I then said to my self, who knows—just go for it girl and see what happens!

Now, back to how we get to know God in a close way to loving God. Jesus in today's gospel reading from Matthew is facing off the Pharisees, after having just essentially silenced the Sadducees (ruling religious leaders of the Temple caste) and their attempt to discredit him.

We find that Jesus can quickly pull out his knowledge of the Torah and apply it to the most challenging question: which commandment is the greatest? he was asked. He brings up the Shema—one Lord, and to love that God—but he digs deeper and reminds them of the second which

comes from a totally different sources (Leviticus..)love your neighbour as yourself!...

He doesn't stop there, he goes on to pull out from Psalm 110 a challenge back to his challengers, which they cannot answer.

The point is that he knew scripture and how to apply it to the challenges the people faced in his day. The law was for the people not the people for the law.

How did he know scripture so well?

The Torah was not in every home (no printing press). Rather the second line after the *Shema* is the statement :*recite these to your children and talk about them when you re at home..when you are away, when you lie down, when you rise.*

There was a significant role that the home had in religious education of children. Home schooling was primary and asa was gathering at the local synagogue but that did not get parents and grand parents off the hook.

And it was an oral tradition so people memorized and studied daily.

If we accepted the Shema, how do get to LOVE God if we don't have a relationship with God? There are so many approaches and if we haven't found on yet..there are many options to try:

1. Some find taking an hour or half hour each morning before they "start anything" and contemplate (or meditate...in ways that open them up to God or the spirit within. They have a ritual that they repeat that settles them into some time to be *with the Divine*...make a cup of tea, sit in the same spot, light a candle...say a prayer....

2. Others I know read the scripture for the day and imagine themselves in the story with a part..and see where that takes them....

3.Some have spiritually oriented books they read....

All end this time of silence with prayer, some in gratitude, some for guidance and some with a question but seeking that "still small voice " to be present to them.

Richard Wagmese, who I quoted earlier has a morning practise and out of occasionally he has aa voice that comes and it is the voice of an OLD WOMAN who answers his question:

*ME: What is the point of prayer and meditation?*

*OLD WOMAN: To bring you closer to the Great Mystery*

*ME: So i can understand it?*

*OLD WOMAN: No, So you can participate in it!*

He then adds: *I grew up spiritually after that!*

Barbara Brown Taylor writes in her book : *An Altar in the World*, that in so many ways we can experience the Divine/God and therefore get closer when we move out into life and notice what is there in nature and to *let go* of some purpose filled, what I would call “forced marches.” She writes about stepping out and into a labyrinth and her experience led her to write”the beauty of physical practices like this is that you do not have to know what you are doing in order to begin for the doing teaches you what you need to know.

You don’t have to go on a long walk in the woods, although they can be most insightful but start with being conscious of each tree, sounds in the forest or on the beach and hear what the shore has to say.

Get a spiritual director to serve as a guide for a while

Write in a journal (again...I have many half full but all were helpful)

Write a dialogue between you and God/Jesus/Creator and questions

Take God for a walk and listen and see what the Divine loves so passionately

May Sarton writes in a way that summarizes what I have found to be true as

we go on our trust walks and talk with God:

Help us to be always hopeful

Gardeners of the Spirit

Who know the without darkness

Nothing comes to birth

as without light...nothing flowers

Let us all *Plant Dreaming Deep* and listen for that voice within which loves us beyond our imagination....and seeks us to know we are beloved.

