
Breakfast on the Beach

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As far back as I can remember I always loved music. Even as a young boy. But we lived in a relatively small town and never really had much of an opportunity to hear really great symphonic music. And the radios were full of static, the 78 records weren't that great, and in my house there just was not a lot of classical music played except in forced practice for forced piano lessons. One time when I was in grammar school our class went out to Foster Auditorium at the University of Alabama to attend a concert. And there I heard for the first time Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. I don't have any idea who played it or whether it was well played or not, but I want you to know that it is still for me the image of the symphony. It was the concrete expression of this abstract thing called a symphony. Now I know that there is a great deal more to understand about symphonic music - and I hope to a degree I have moved beyond it, but I began with that vivid picture, that dynamic image that was concrete and specific and true. And I will never forget it as long as I live.

Now it may seem unfortunate for our 21st century minds, which are conditioned by technological precision and mathematical exactitude, that the only way we can talk about the abstraction of God is with images - with mental pictures, with metaphors, -- with poetry. Of course we know we can't figure out how to get to the moon and back that way. We can't figure out how to do open-heart surgery and transplants and genetic engineering that way. We can't actually build a skyscraper that way. And yet for people of faith, and maybe all human beings, to deal with the most central issues in our lives, all we have for building blocks toward our theological understanding are concrete images, metaphors and stories.

Now of course that's really true about any abstraction, like God, which we cannot see but can only imagine""and of course to imagine means "to image", to use your imagination. I think to some degree, that we all have some images of God and we might need others. Everybody has one or more, whether we are aware of it or not. We have never seen God, but we still have a picture of God.

I'll also bet your picture of God is not always the same, not even during your own life time. It changes. When you were a child, God may have been very near to you when you knelt down by your bed with your mama or daddy and prayed, "God bless Mama and Daddy and make me a good boy or girl." Then when you became a young person and faced all the complexities of life and saw before you perhaps for the first time the riddles of existence that were beyond our comprehension, maybe God disappeared completely. And so your picture of God was an empty absence. And maybe when you grew a little older and became a little more mature, God may have come back , so to speak, but not exactly the way God was when you knelt by your childhood bed.

So don't be surprised if your own image of God changes as you grow. In fact, perhaps it ought to change. Be alarmed if it remains exactly the same. The picture changes because we change and the world changes and the stuff by which we make images become wider and more extensive. And yet for Christians there is one very important thing to remember: In the

New Testament we definitely get an image of God. The human, Jesus, is the concrete and specific image of the unseen God. That's what the incarnation doctrine is really about. Therefore as Christians we begin with Jesus. We begin with the concrete and move out to the abstract. For most people I think that is the way we go. You begin with the picture, the image, and then move out to the abstract in the same way that the specific work of Beethoven points toward the abstraction of symphony.

So here in the Gospel for today, we get an image, another picture in the Jesus story; one that has not been used much in theological discussion or for reflection in Christian pictures and art. Much more popular ones are the good shepherd, the loving father, the faithful teacher, the crucified savior or even the liberating reformer, driving folks out of the Temple. The story in today's gospel goes like this:

One evening Peter and few of the others took the boat out fishing. They didn't get a nibble between them but stuck it out all night. It was something to do anyway. It passed the time. Just at dawn, in the weird yellow half light, somebody showed up on the beach and cupped his mouth with his hand, ANY LUCK? The answer was NO in more ways than one, and they said it. Then give it another try, the man said. Reel in the nets and cast them off the port beam this time. There was nothing to lose they hadn't lost already so they did it, and the catch had to be seen to be believed, had to be felt, the heft of it almost swamping them as they pulled it aboard. Peter saw who the man was first, and heaved himself overboard like a side of beef. The water was chest-high as he plowed through it, tripping over his feet in the shallows so he ended up scrambling ashore on all fours. Jesus was standing there waiting for him by a little charcoal fire he had going. The others came ashore, slowly, like men in a dream, not daring to speak for fear they would wake up. Jesus got them to bring him some of their fish and then they stood around at a little distance while he did the cooking. When it was done, he gave them the word. "Come and have breakfast," he said, and they all came over and sat down beside him in the sand. They sat there around the fire eating their fish with the sun coming up over the water behind them and they were all so hushed and glad and peaceful that anybody passing by would never have guessed that not long before, their host, their cook, had been nailed up on a hill outside the city and left there to die without a friend to his name.

So what are the images of God implied by this story, what does this story of the Resurrected Jesus point to about God, the very core of all that is, the heart of the whole universe. We have to use our imaginations:

As in Symphony is Beethoven's fifth, God is the good shepherd, the loving father, the faithful teacher, the crucified savior, the liberating reformer. God is, Jesus of Nazareth.

In this powerful, but lovely resurrection story, behold these images of God:

God is, a gracious cook, who chooses the fatted calf and makes not just wine, but the very best wine out of water for the feast.

And God is, a hospitable chef, who prepares a table before me in the wilderness in the presences of my enemies.

And God is, a welcoming host who invites with gusto, COME ON AND HAVE BREAKFAST. who sits down to eat with everybody, who doesn't take the head of the table, nor just stay over the fire, but picnics on the sand with his friends, as the sun rises on the Easter dawn.

So the questions of these images are at least twofold: What does God as cook, as chef and as host mean for you, to be continued. And perhaps more than that, will you have breakfast with him on the beach? Think about it. Amen

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