

ANOTHER LOOK AT GOD

Mother's Day, 2019

I recall a Sunday when I was elementary school age. I was spending time at my cousin's place. I assume the adults were at Grandma's and Grandpa's in the same village. Donny and I were doing stuff outside. Other, younger cousins were in the house. A thunderstorm approached and the younger cousins were scared. So, Donny and I took his BB gun and pretended to shoot the thunder as a way of letting the younger ones know they were being protected. Actually seemed fairly ingenious in my eyes.

My mom disagreed. Though I had no siblings in that younger crowd—my brothers were someplace else—Mom somehow got wind of what we had done. In her mind, since thunder is part of creation which originates from God, what we had done had been way over the top disrespectful of God. I had not thought of that. Might still disagree. However, I know she was trying her best to teach us due respect for God, as any mother should.

When the point had been made, Mom asked her next question: Did you do anything else you should not have done? Most boys would have been brave enough to deny any other transgressions. But, I had a very soft conscience; guilt was a constant companion. And so I 'fessed up. Donny and I had rolled up toilet paper and tried smoking it. Well this was a problem! You see, from the list of seven deadly sins, we had removed one—gluttony. Food was way too much fun in Mennonite homes and gatherings. However, we had added two more—smoking and drinking alcohol. (What's the difference between a Mennonite and someone from the United Church? United Church folks will say "Hi" to you at the liquor store.) Mom was deeply troubled by this sin, and again, I need to give her the benefit of the doubt. This was the tradition she was raised in and Mom was doing her best to pass on the Christian faith and the ethics that went with

it. Though this was not usually Mom's style—she was confident in her own parenting—this time she said: “Wait till Dad comes home.”

Aah, those famous words: “Wait till Dad comes home.” Who of us has not heard those fateful words and waited, trembling. It really wasn't okay to wish that Dad would have an accident and never come home, but we sure wished it wouldn't be for a long time.

“Wait till Dad comes home!” Those words actually have a much longer history than we might think. They go back at least 2500 or more years to a time when the Ancient Street Corner Preachers and Crusade Evangelists loved to use a version of that line in their preaching, over and over again. Amos von Tekoa probably came closest to the exact phrase: “Get ready for your Father to get here!” After listing both the nastiness of the deeds of the people and the brutal punishments that their Father had already tried and others he seemed eager to unleash, Amos wrapped it all up and thundered from his street corner: “Prepare to meet your God!” “Wait till Father gets home!”

It was in that context that an Ancient Folk Singer offered another, much gentler, more reassuring poetic picture of God. When he showed up in a local park or weekend house party, he would start strumming his harp and begin: “Our Father God our shepherd is, he makes us down to lie. In pastures green he leadeth us, the quiet waters by.” The people loved the music; the lyrics touched their hearts, but something was wrong. Just last night the Street Corner Preacher had shouted: “Just you wait till Father God gets here.” Now, their favorite Folk Singer was singing that Father God is a shepherd. Whom were they to believe?

God, who heard all this, actually had the same problem. God wasn't much fond of the Street Corner guys and their “Wait till Dad comes home” preaching. There is no way God

wanted God showing up to be scary. God did not want people hoping God would never come home. God realized that something had to be done.

The one thing this God could not do is what some of the other gods had done: suggest that there was more than one god, an Angry God and a Caring God Good Cop/Bad Cop. That would be too much like the pagans, and besides, that left the question, which god would win out in the final end? So God had another plan. God would have to help change the people's view and understanding of God's character and God knew just the way to do it. God needed a metaphor change, away from angry, scary to gentle, caring. Looking down on this beautiful planet God spied just what was needed, the perfect metaphor to show what God really is like. What did God see? Moms! All around the planet, in the animal kingdom and among humans there were thousands of moms, the perfect metaphor for God. God was tempted to give the divine butt a kick in the pants. God should have thought of this sooner, but better late than never. Mothers and motherhood, the nurturing nature of moms, their role in giving birth and giving life, the unconditional love of mothers, the fierce protective character of moms, the gentle but firm pushing of children out into the world that no one does better than moms, that is who God is like and therefore that is the metaphor God would use.

Now all that was left was to find preachers and singers who might be susceptible to hints, suggestions and whisperings. God spotted Moses, snuck up behind him and whispered in his ear: "Moses, in your farewell sermon, tell the people I am a mom." Moses blinked twice and was quite impressed with himself. He had just had a great idea for something to put into his farewell sermon. When he was a shepherd back in the day and looked for sheep in the crags, Moses had seen eagles and in particular took note of what a mother eagle did. First, of course, she laid the eggs and hatched them. Then she brought food to the eaglets and protected them under her

sheltering wings. Then, when it was time for the the little ones to venture out, Mother Eagle would manage to put an eaglet on her back and take off, out over the wide nothingness past the edge of the cliff, the eaglet shivering with fear. Then, in a specially designed swoop, the Mother Eagle would send the eaglet into space. The poor little bird near died of fright but then started feverishly flapping its wings. The paralyzing drop slowed and the eaglet sensed it was producing some lift. It could do this. It could fly. But then those previously untested wings got tired, and the eaglet started dropping again. The Mother Eagle, who had stayed close, saw what was happening. She swooped underneath the eaglet so the little bird could land on mama's back. Then she carried her baby back to the nest. The first session was done.¹

That, said Moses, is God, the loving Mother Eagle who pushes us to try, to launch out, to be adventuresome, to try things that might be scary, but always with the assurance that God would be close to catch us. Not “Wait till Dad gets home God” but “Let's have an adventure God” with the assurance of constant Love, Presence, and Caring. And then just to make sure dads did not get left out—after all, Moses was a dad—the famous Shepherd of People added: “Please, please, don't ever forget the Father God who sired you nor the Mother God who gave you birth. Life, strength, and ability come from your Father and Mother, all wrapped up in One God”.²

The idea had now been planted, right there in the founding teachings, the Torah, of the Hebrew people. God's hope was that with a little bit of nudging other Preachers, Storytellers, and the Folk Singers of the people would pick up on the idea. They did. Hosea bar Beer, the Storyteller who could take your breath away with the profound stories that taught about God, picked up on Moses' idea and told the people that God was the one who had taught them to walk.

¹ See Deuteronomy 32:11–12.

² See Deuteronomy 32:18.

Like the Mother Eagle, now as a human mom, God had taken little Junior's hands and encouraged him to take a step or two. A couple more the next day. And then, one day, without Junior realizing at first, Mom let go and Junior was walking. Then, suddenly noticing his hands were free, Junior plumped down on his diapered bum. He couldn't walk without help. Aah, but Mom knew he could and they would try again and again till Junior as a young adult was ready to head out into the world. But Mom would always be only a phone call away. That said Hosea, is what God has done for you and is for you.

Isaiah bar Amoz, Hosea's contemporary and one of the great poets and folk singers of the day, tended often towards the "Wait till Dad gets home" theme. But then, like Moses, Isaiah heard a whisper and like Moses was sure it was his own idea. What the people really needed was the confidence that God was Loving, Present, and Caring. He had sat around enough back yard fires and spent enough happy hours in the local pub to have heard how people felt: desperate, alone, like God had packed up and gone on vacation, forgetting the kids at home. Remember the movie *Home Alone*? These guys thought they were living the movie. And so one night Isaiah decided it was time to write a new song. Taking out the harp, he began strumming and singing. As the words came to him, he would jot them down on a piece of parchment and then try again, till finally he had what he needed, just the song that would help the people. And he had a plan. The next day, when the people came to the temple for Shabbat worship, he would be waiting for them on the stairs, and sing them a song they would not forget.

You think that God has left for good
For you've not done the things you should.
But God is not like Angry Dad
Whose comings make all children sad.
Think of your mom, who nursed you long
Taught you to walk so you grew strong.
Would she forget her own dear child?
Leave you alone in desert wild?

There is no way and ev'n if so
That's not where God will ever go
See God's tattoos, all up one arm
Around his neck down, well what the darn
Across his chest and down his back
The names go on, it's quite a knack
That is God's love, she won't forget
No matter what, so what the heck
God's always there, God always cares
God's love is sure so no one dares
To kidnap you or think God's blind
God's love forever, yours and mine.³

The people listened in open mouthed amazement. This was brand new stuff for most, but oh, what wonderful stuff. Soon, as Isaiah started again, they began to sing along. Then a third and fourth time and soon, they knew it by memory and knew they would be singing it in the shower, while cooking lentils and pita, and while hoeing the corn. "God's love forever, yours and mine."

And God, God smiled. The metaphor had worked. There was no better metaphor, no better example, no better picture of God then moms. And, God knew, as long as the human race survived, that picture of God would always go with the people. God, the Mother: Loving, Present, Caring.

Aren't we lucky to have that picture of God in our grandmothers, moms and the mothers of our children!! Look around. See God is here, in every woman. Children and men, we are truly fortunate. God truly loves us to give us these pictures of God in the women in our lives.

³ My English Blue Grass version of Isaiah's poem in Isa 49:14-16.