

“God?”

Genesis 1:1; Exodus 3:14;
Romans 9:20-24; John 1:1-18

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Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

Last week I finished the sermon with a statement about Jesus. I said Jesus was a pretty incredible guy, so we should listen to him. The interesting thing about a statement like that is that it can almost sound trite because these days we use words like “incredible” fairly easily. There is a fair amount of hyperbole in our lives. I think of the statement as almost ironic. While saying, “He’s a pretty incredible guy” is a pretty incredible thing to say, it can’t really capture the full nature of that incredibility. It’s incredible, as in “it’s not really credible” because it’s beyond my imagination to fully understand what it means to say that Jesus was the logos, for example. To say that Jesus was the light. To say Jesus is God come to us in some way that we might hear and understand God better because of that presentation to us.

If we think about logos, we often think of it as the reason expressed of God, or the Word. Perhaps we use that definition because we tend to think that everything occurs because of reason. It could be just the nature of God being expressed. It’s the word; it’s the expression of God. It is through that expression, by that expression, that everything comes about and indeed it is that expression that comes to be among us—the expression of who God is, the light God gives, the life God shares.

Perhaps the reason that I get a little caught up with that is because the reason Jesus is so incredible is built upon the idea that God is doing something. God is expressing God’s reason, God’s light, God’s life. So what am I getting caught up on? I’m getting caught up on that God would do that. There are two parts to that. One is the incredible nature of God doing that, but the other part of that is just the thought that God does it. Somehow I feel like in this world we live in, the only place I generally hear anything much about God is right here in church, and that’s only rarely—only one hour a week sometimes. The rest of the world seems to have decided that God doesn’t matter, or that there is, in fact, no God. It feels to me like God has been pushed aside or assumed to not really exist. The only people who believe in God are those crazy people over on the side. So if we want to think about the incredible nature of Jesus, we have to take a step back and think about the God that Jesus shows us, the God that sends him, the God that’s real.

Our scripture tells us that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The idea that there is one out there who created everything is incredible. And then that moment with Moses where God says, “I truly exist, so go tell people that the One who truly exists is the one who sent you.”

In a world in which we have discovered how more and more things work, it feels like that has become what’s important: how things work. And that’s something we can all figure out. We’ve figured out so much about how the world works. In my mind, I think we have forgotten a question, or maybe we just don’t want to deal with the question: Why? Why is there anything rather than nothing?

Let me get at this a slightly different way. When we were in Iona this summer I picked up a book called “The Green Ray” by Jules Verne. Some of you will know Jules Verne as a guy who wrote some early science fiction—*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and some of those. This wasn’t a science fiction book. It was about the idea that when the sun sets over the ocean there is a particular moment when, if you’re watching, you may see a flash of green. It’s a pretty incredible sight. It’s a real phenomenon. The book is about this young lady who is coming of age and has several suitors, and who is the right suitor for her? At the very end she and her two suitors are at the ocean at sunset, and the green ray occurs. One of the suitors is talking about how it happens scientifically. The other one isn’t watching the ocean at all. He and the young lady are looking at each other; they are falling in love. The difference: we know how the green ray works, but do we see the wonder of it? Can we explain love by a formula or a certain set of experiments? We know some things that go into it. Can we explain life?

There’s a philosopher, Charles Taylor, who suggests that what has happened over the last couple hundred years is the disenchantment of our world. We’ve begun to see our world pretty much functionally. We see how things work and when something is occurring, we problematize it into a form that we should be able to solve if we come up with the right model and do the right experiments and shape correctly. What if there are parts of life we can’t do that with? What if we don’t see fully the consequences of all our actions?

For me, as I come to think about what it means to think about who God is or to think about God in our lives today I really come with a great sadness because it feels to me like as our world has become disenchanted, as we’re asked to not think about God in so many compartments of our lives, our lives become impoverished. Where does love come from? Is love important? Is joy? Kindness? Hope? How do those things populate our lives?

For me, it’s because we have a creator that exists, who has given us life that is full of love and opportunities for kindness, moments of joy, even suffering. There’s something about it that brings life. Isn’t that what the beginning of John talks about with Jesus? He comes and he brings life. Letting go of God and not allowing God to be part of more than just this moment is to impoverish our lives.

For me the journey is hard because I think I learn not to trust God or to trust the reality of God. I think I’m still working on that—working to overcome that impoverishment in my own life. You know that saying “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” That’s how I feel about God. I can’t convince you of God. I can’t even convince myself of God. I have to drink. I have to open myself up to God’s possibility and presence. I have to begin to enter into that wonder, to recognize the possibility that I’m loved.

For me, trusting God removes some of that which has impoverished our lives and opens up a new vista. It makes me wonder, how do I listen better? How do I notice more fully? How do I participate in what God’s about? Amen.