

May 12, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Acts 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 15-23; John 17: 6-19

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Bev and I enjoyed this past week in Missoula with our grandchildren. I read a book about sea creatures to Charlotte, our 4-year-old, and so she said, 'Guess what I am.' (You know that game.) And they all began like this [demonstrating], so they all looked the same to me.

Finally, she said, *'This one has a horn.'*

I said, 'A rhino.'

And she said, *'No.'*

I said, 'Unicorn.'

'Grandpa, unicorns can't swim.'

I said, 'I don't know.'

She said, *'A swordfish.'*

I said, 'That's very good. That's very good.'

So, Bev is sitting on the couch with Evie, our 2-year-old, and I joined them on the couch.

Evie has a doll in her hands, and she says,

'Baby needs art.'

We said, 'What?'

'Baby needs art.'

'What?'

'Art, baby needs art.'

And Bev finally figured it out: 'Oh, heart—the baby needs heart.'

'No! Art!'

And then, finally, Bev got it: 'Baby needs a shirt.' Oh. Okay, pretty good for Evie, our 2-year-old.

So, since we're talking about Eve(!)—the first woman in the Bible...

Eve always got a bad rap. To this day, she's that temptress who is so able to manipulate and control Adam that he did her every bidding. He didn't think for himself. He didn't make decisions or choices. She was that good. It's either that version, or, she had that certain smile. *'Hey big guy....'* You know that one, yeah. And he's such a simplistic buffoon that he goes along with it.

So, what do you want? You want him in charge in either case? I don't think so.

Eve is the other image of God. In Genesis, it makes it very clear in the Hebrew—*"Let's make humanity in our image, both male and female in our image."* [Genesis 1: 27] Male and female right from the get-go. That's what the text says. And so, God lives with a woman's mind, and integrity, and insight, and body, and understanding, and creativity, and intellectual gifts.

It's right there. Right there, but we're still trapped inside of that ancient myth, aren't we?

'Yes, she's the temptress and he's the victim. We poor men—what we have to endure! If you only understood—men are the avengers and women are sex objects—it's so simple.

Half of the population brutal, violent, ignorant, and the other half commodities, right?'

That's the way we're still operating for the most part, isn't it? And then the Fundamentalists of every stripe go on justifying all this because, well, '*women came from men, didn't they, so women are clearly secondary.*' Well, *actually the animals came before human beings—so get over it, dude. Get over it.*

Eve is the icon of the feminine in God, and if that's so, then everything has to change. Because truth dies—there is no access to truth if we are eliminating women by subjugation, domination, oppression, or making women invisible. And the women in this congregation know that those dynamics are still in play aren't they, every day, absolutely claiming you're secondary. That we get to change.

Abba is the Hebrew, Aramaic name for Papa, from which we get 'father.' And 'Abba' is the great mystery, who is forever withdrawing from our intellectual grasp, incapable of locating but the One who is sustaining the whole universe. With this hidden love it is the love which is holding the whole thing together—as bad as it may be at sometimes—holding it all together.

But without witnesses, science and all of its glorious capacities cannot identify where life comes from, let alone what we're doing here. It just says, you know, 'it's in motion'. We're just—'Good luck!'

The great work of Jesus is revealing who the Abba is—drawing the Abba out and making God known as the One who is the ineffable, exquisite, unconditional Love—that Love who's always forever inviting prodigals home—'You blew it again. You forgot who you are. You're confused, meandering, wandering, don't think there's any point to it anymore.' *It's come back home. Come home!*, Which is why Jesus' work is always about getting closer, and closer, and closer, and closer to folks in need, who are suffering, who are hurting, who are despised, who are outsiders, who are miserable, who are hopeless. Closer. Closer. Closer. Closer. Closer.

What kind of a God is that? We want to keep our distances, don't we? '*I'm my own person. I belong here. I know what I'm doing.*' (If that was true, they wouldn't make TV commercials. Talk about gullible!)

Oh, no. No, we're being invited home. And all of those things I just named—that coming closer—are all feminine and motherly qualities, aren't they? Not all of us get good moms. (I know that.) But the loving ones keep drawing us closer, don't they, no matter what? Some of you have done things so nasty you're not about to tell the rest of us what you did in high school, right? Those stories stay buried between you and your mom.

Oh, that's the best of God: '*You belong. Come back. You're welcome here. Nothing can ever separate us.*' And that's why we can invoke God as a mother. We have a motherly father, and a fatherly mother. They're just inextricably woven together. There is no separation. Not for God, and not in loving us.

So, this day we also celebrate the Ascension, which is not Jesus just wafting away, and saying 'I'm done here.' No. This is a return, a re-entering into the depths of that mystery— the great

mystery who appears to us as darkness—but the Truth is actually luminous vastness. And as Jesus leaves, he's permeating the whole cosmos with this Love that will fulfill all in all.

May the eyes of your minds and hearts be open to understand this deepest mystery to which we already belong—which opens the hearts to receive those in conflict, opponents, those who break our hearts, that we might sink and move into that deep vastness of compassion which heals all in all. Jesus was lifted up onto the cross, lifted up from the grave, lifted into the heavens that we might become One.

You see, in the end, Evie is right. We all need new 'arts. You need a new 'art?
We need new hearts—and maybe a new shirt too.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen