

Night Visions: Part One: Deepest Yearning: Deepest Trust

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We are living in extraordinary, historic, even “biblical” times! Our best and our worst as humans made shockingly apparent, our sinfulness and our greatness. Our greatness...

The speeches on the floor of the senate and the house, when they returned into that place which just hours before felt like a war zone, an attempted overthrow of our government by white domestic terrorists, well! when they returned, their speeches, both parties, so many of them were lofty, inspiring, determined. They were shaken, even traumatized. Still and yet they were grounded in the greatest philosophies and religions of the world. Even the God of money had to yield the floor that afternoon and evening! Yes! They spoke of the constitution and democracy; and of religion, as with the words from ST. Francis of Assis. These were the kind of lofty words that could return them to the sacred halls of democracy and inspire them to rise to the occasion. With anything less lofty, they would have fled and faltered.

I am reminded of the book The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee by David Treuer of Leech Lake about how native peoples in this land are not only surviving, but many are thriving and when they tell their stories of this emergence, this rising up, whether political, economic, educational, artistic, it almost always begins with a return to Ceremony, to the stories and rituals of their sacred way.

Let it not be lost in the turmoil of the week, that the persons arguably most responsible for turning the senate to a new party and a new agenda, are people of faith. Stacy Abrams, the Georgian organizer extraordinaire, both parents were Methodist ministers. Rev. Raphael Warnock is devoting his life to this kind of public service now because of what he learned in Sunday school. It’s all about the Jesus path and the other beautiful sacred paths...

This pandemic has exposed so much... Most notably what really matters in this life... And this is what religion and the arts are all about....

We know we are living in times when the superficial, the decadent, the trivial just don’t cut it anymore. The greatest art is gestating, the greatest art that *will* grab our attention, this attention span made wacky with all this time, necessarily, spent on the internet, but we will soon return to the theater, to gallery openings, to concerts and we will feast! And the greatest myths, our religious stories, are and will, more and more, feed us the lofty thoughts that these human minds need to feed off, to be nourished by. Nothing less will do. Nothing shallow will suffice anymore!!

This word “God”, interpreted, described, understood in so many different ways, demands our attention. God, the Great Mysterious, God, the Ultimate Referent, God, the Ground of Being, God, Being Itself, God, the name which must not be uttered in Hebrew scriptures, it’s beyond all human

words, but whose presence puts everything else in life in true perspective... “God”, a word we dare not dispense with.

In our Bible story today, God shows up in two ways. God is personified, which is not usual, this way to talk about God in our lives. And God is the great mysterious invoked by the starry night sky.

In this story, Abraham is expressing his doubt in God’s promise. Here he is. He and Sarah left everything known to enter into the unknown future to help shape a new humanity, after humans had so messed up.... So, God starts again saying: “Abraham and Sarah, go forth into the unknown and I will make of you and your progeny a blessing for all.”

On this particular night, God comes to Abraham saying: “Fear not. I am your shield. Your reward will be very great.” But this time Abraham shakes his head and says: “Mmmmm.... I don’t feel it. Mmmmm.. I don’t think so ... It’s not going to happen... Ever... We’re childless... We’re old. How can our descendants bless the earth? No. Or maybe it will, kind of, but through my servant, not through me... I guess we will just have to settle for this then.”

God stays quiet as Abraham speaks. God does not jump in with reassurances or a quick fix. God listens deeply to Abraham. And from that silence, Abraham speaks his truth, even that which he perhaps hasn’t fully acknowledged himself, he speaks of what is most on his heart... in his existence... on this earth.... not a personal selfish wish, but a by-God-this-is-my-deepest-yearning-for-the-world wish And Abram expresses onto God his deep disappointment and even ultimate distrust. “Look, you have given me no offspring, and so a servant born in my house is to be my heir?... I guess I’ll just have to settle for less than your original promise, God....”

Abraham is not the only one who is beginning to distrust God’s ultimate promises....

Oh God, it happened again. Even after the worldwide protests, after George Floyd was murdered, with all races, and for weeks and weeks and weeks, and I began to have hope that this time things would really change. This has been happening my entire life. My parents, the grandchildren of slaves, had the conversation with me and especially my brothers and then I had it with my children and then with my grandchildren, the conversation about how careful they have to be out in the world, that they are not safe... that they could still make a life, but just be always careful. And then it happened! The George Floyd uprisings... Those young people, oh my God, they lifted high my hopes that the world was about to change. I tried to protect my heart, to not expect too much, but they lifted up the ceiling of my hopes, oh yes, they did. Then came the Kenosha verdict not to charge police officers. After all of this?!!!... Hmmm... maybe we just have to settle for less. ... it’s easier to believe little than to believe big. It’s just that I allowed myself to trust again in your promise that everyone born is a precious child of God and will one day be treated that way. I suppose I’ll just have to settle for less.

Oh God, I can hardly believe it's real.... They are laying the pipes now. Soon under the Mississippi, so the oil can flow. Even though they know, everyone knows that to save the earth, to give hope to our children for their futures, to stem the growing tide of climate refugees across the planet now, we need to move dramatically in a new direction, away from fossil fuels. "If the pipeline is built, Minnesotans could turn off everything in the state, stop traveling and still not come close to meeting [the state's emission reduction goals](#)." And it's not like we don't know how to power the planet. WE have everything we need to make the change. It's a sugar high right now, this short-term influx of jobs, instead of the soon to arrive well-paying clean energy jobs of the next presidential administration. And there's this: "Tribal people worked so hard on the elections. The Native vote became a force that helped carry [several key areas of the country and our state](#). On the heels of those victories, the granting of final permits to construct Enbridge's Line 3, which will cross Anishinaabe treaty lands, was a breathtaking betrayal." (Erdrich) How did we get duped into being hopeful that we could stop Line 3 during those six years of appeals and the growing movement across the state? We're going to have to settle for less, much more modest goals in our state... to constrict our hope... come what may....

Oh God, this pandemic has revealed the growing gap between the haves and the have nots in our country. It's really about life or death now. The haves can keep safe working from home or living off healthy pensions, while the have less or have nots are losing jobs or if not losing them, delivering the goods to the haves, and so at much greater risk of infection. As the homeless encampments are spreading, as the lines at Food pantries lengthen, we thought this would finally be a time of great national reckoning about the shameful distribution of wealth in this country. Hah! Fat chance that! In the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, this pandemic, American billionaires' wealth grew by a third. They are only getting wealthier....Mother Mary your revolutionary song about God's dream of justice is muted. The most we can hope for is that these billionaires will increase their charitable giving. We'll have to settle for that as the inexorable inevitable wealth and power continues to concentrate...

We get you Abraham... How that night you were wakeful, and your mind started racing and taking you down the rabbit hole of fear and bitterness and distrust. ...distrust of that promise you've been taught that God will ultimately prevail; that God's promise of the restoration of the beloved community will happen; that "the arc of the moral universe, though long, bends toward justice"; that the 7th generation will be provided for; that all the people of the earth will find a place to live safely, with food and shelter sufficient for their needs; that we will overcome some day, maybe not in our lifetime, but in our descendants' lifetime, it will happen... But in the middle of that night you doubt that it will.... ever.... And so, you begin to constrict your expectations, to set your sights lower, to settle for less. It's just so much easier to live that way; easier to believe little than to believe big....

And that's when it happens.... Now the Word of God came to Abraham saying: ***the promise holds***.... And God takes Abraham outside, on that clear stary night, and says: "Look up at the heavens. count the stars"....Yes, the stars represent the multitude of his descendants. But it's more than that. God takes him from his middle of the night sleepless oh so human cogitating and fearing and distrusting

mind and places him under the night sky where he is swept up in wordless awe of the great mystery. God lifts the ceiling off, the ceiling that had been dropping lower and lower.... And Abraham looks at the night sky and his dream-constricting-human-calculations evaporate for he is in the presence of something far bigger than he can even comprehend...

Oh, how we need our scientists and our policy wonks and our historians and our analysts and pragmatists and economists, our thinkers, our information and our insights.... But oh, how we also need our moments of awe that blow the roof off of all of it! How we need a dose of that ancient biblical reverence and wonder... that lifts high our hopes and dreams....

God bless the night visions that keep God's human creatures from settling for less, that keep God's human creatures believing big and acting accordingly!!

Sources

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