

“Is There Enough For All?”

My UCC clergy friend was feeling bad about saying good-bye to the folk in the impoverished Kenya village where he had been serving for several months. He was sad of heart, longing to spend more time with the people who had become family to him. He was suffering with a guilty conscience, thinking about how he had so much and how they had so little. He was ashamed of his inability to fix it for them. So he said to one of the mothers, “I wish that I could stay and do more.” To which, she replied, “Thank you for what you have done. But don’t worry, Jesus is here.”

Now, who says a thing like that? After all, any person in their right mind knows that Jesus hasn’t set foot on this earth for two thousand years. Jesus didn’t dig up the earth, plant the seed, and drill the well in the village. Jesus didn’t administer the life saving drug to the dying child. Jesus did not, people did. What kind of penniless mother would say, “Don’t worry, the Lord will provide?” when the last of the help was leaving town? What was the religious imagination like in this woman that fueled her faith with enough force to still her fears and to give her reason to hope? How did she learn to take the leap of faith in God and to trust in the way of Jesus who did not limit himself with human definitions of what is possible? Why would she think that the Almighty cared for her and was on her side? In her world of scarcity where did she get the idea that there is enough food for all?

Where else, but the Bible. The Bible is sacred language that shapes our belief in God. It gives us a consistent picture of who God is and what God is doing. It is our most reliable praise testimony about God that counters the tendency in our mind’s eye to make God in our own image. Listen again to psalm 146. How does your image of God fit with that of the psalmist?

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Sovereign their God,
who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry. God sets the prisoners free;
God opens the eyes of those who cannot see.

God lifts up those who are bowed down, God loves the righteous.
God watches over the strangers;
and upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked God brings to ruin.
God will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.

In the stories of the Bible we learn how the One Holy, Mysterious God of Israel works with and through nature, creation, events, and people to bless and bring new life to the world. In his recent UCC article, “Still Listening?” Anthony B. Robinson wrote:

It (scripture) is the library of the community of faith. It is our best friend and most loyal critic. Most of all, it is strange. Get over the idea that you know it or know what it says. You don’t, I promise. And remember, as theologian Walter Brueggemann remarked, “The strangest thing of all about the Bible is God” (*Stillspeaking*, p. 56).

The Bible is full of stories about people of faith who encountered this God Who did strange things like telling his prophet to seek help from a nobody who had nothing; Who crossed all manmade boundaries of sex, culture, race, nationality and religion with compassionate care to include every person in the steadfast love of God; Who taught that by humbling and emptying oneself of personal agendas and driving ego needs, the soul would have room to be filled with the grace and power of God; Who stepped into the shoes of a man so that people might learn to trust the counterintuitive, politically incorrect, and culturally offensive ways of Love’s Power; Who thought it important to stop within the grand work of creating and recreating the entire universe . . . to bring a child back to life. Jesus said, “Young man, I say to you, rise!” The young man sat up and began to speak. They were all filled with awe and praised God saying: “A great prophet has been risen among us!” and “God has come to help God’s people;” Who did, and still does----relate----with human beings through Word and Faith! *Some people think*, reflected Martin Copenhaver, *that belief and faith are synonymous, but they are not.*

Imagine that you are at a circus. A skilled high-wire artist has accomplished so many marvelous feats that the audience has come to believe that he can do almost anything. The ringmaster

addresses the crowd: "Ladies and gentlemen, how many of you believe that this daring man can ride safely over the high wire on his bicycle while carrying someone on his shoulders? If you believe he can do it, please raise your hand!" Many in the audience raised their hands. "Very well, then," says the ringmaster, surveying all the raised hands, "now who would like to be the first to volunteer to sit on his shoulders?" The difference between belief and faith is the difference between staying in your seat and volunteering to climb on the shoulders of the high-wire artist. We may believe that God has "the whole world in his hands," but faith is the act of trust by which we put ourselves in God's hands" (UCC Daily Devotional, 6/4/2010).

Stories about Jesus unite our head and hearts in courageous faith for an understanding of how to follow Him in Love for the world. "The Christian," commented Henri Nouwen, "keeps saying that a new way of being human and a new peace are possible (quoted by Rebecca Gaudino in *New Proclamation* 2007). The woman in the Kenyan village told my clergy friend not to worry, because she had encountered the Risen Jesus busy at God's work of creating compassionate hearts and inspiring generous souls who share earth's resources so that she and all God's children might live. "Don't worry," she said to her pastor, "the prophetic Jesus of the gospels is here."

Today is Children's Day in many mainline churches across the nation. It's a day that coincides with the ending of the school year and the beginning of summer. It's the one day of the year that we corporately pause to consider the importance of religious education and the centrality of the Bible to our faith. This is our day to recognize and give thanks for our growth in our knowledge of God and faith in Jesus that we have received through our mutual commitment to the study of scripture. In the old days we used to give out pins for perfect class attendance and special awards for memorization of scripture. Today we are giving a living plant to students and teachers. The soil symbolizes the living word of the Bible that holds the power to transform us into beautiful people who bless God's world. Around the year 300 A.D. desert father, Theonas of Alexandria advised:

Let no day pass by without reading some portion of the sacred scriptures and giving some space to meditation; for nothing feeds the soul so well as those sacred studies do.

1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the Word of the Lord came to Elijah saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there, for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks: he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug: I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: "The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Luke 7:11-17

Soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was the mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has been risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on God's people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.