

***Obliterating the bond against us, . . . he removed it, nailing it to the cross.***

Our biblical tradition is loaded with instances where the Source of our very universe, whom it calls Jahweh or Elohim, speaks directly to someone in order to instruct, warn, legislate – or say things like “let there be light.” In other words, speaks and things happen. And what happens? A universe happens as well as all its inhabitants – you and me. This mysterious Being is vocal, expressive, utters horizons, landscapes, space, a cosmic order as well as behaviors that can be judged as right or wrong. In sum, you might say he is *outspoken*.

Today’s readings, however, may coincide more with how this God *really* communicates. Many wise people down through history would rather view God as reticent, *withdrawn* more than *outspoken* - indeed that he *plays games* with us, like hide and seek. Consider today’s Gospel. May not God be better reflected as the cranky neighbor who has gone to bed and doesn’t want to be disturbed? “It’s nighttime. Closed till sunrise. Until then stop knocking. Let me alone in my divinity.” And this! Even though the fellow has a pressing problem. “Do not bother me; the door has already been locked . . .”

May not the same distancing be true of God’s behavior in today’s *first* reading from Genesis? Already in biblical times as well as in our modern world (so devastated by the advanced technology of weaponry) the brutal consequences of human conflict have swept up so many innocent people along with the guilty instigators of such violence. So even back in those days people were beginning to question the idea of an individual amounting merely to a cell within the body politic and fated to suffer along with the collectivity – with no worth individually. They all go off to the concentration camps. In other words, Abraham has begun *to think* (which is a kind of *persistent* prayer) – and *dares* ask God where is justice to be found in such an indiscriminate “collective” sense of human guilt that licenses, for example, an event like Hiroshima.

And here begins the hide and seek. God, who wants to destroy Sodom, the good along with the bad, allows Abraham to educate him. It’s as if he were saying: “Abraham, you raise interesting questions. If there are only fifty just citizens of Sodom or only forty-five or just ten, why must *they* suffer along with the sinners? Indeed your questions make even me – Almighty God – wonder why *anyone*, innocent or guilty, should be so treated! You are making me realize that I am not just a God of vindictive absolutes but a God of grace, forgiveness, mercy – that I should care, not terrify. Thank you for letting me un-conceal how I really am – humanely divine.

Too often the word prayer brings to mind asking for something – like our daily bread. But on a more authentic level prayer means interviewing God, raising questions, wondering, peering into the mystery of our lives, digging deeper into the why of things – even as meanings seem to elude us – because as the nature of God and our world unfold from one experience to another we find our horizons, our “absolutes” have changed, that we are becoming in some way as big as, as delightfully mysterious as the gracious God who eludes us – in order to provoke more inquiries to perpetuate the conversation and the journey.

***Geoff Wood***