

2 Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A

When we try to think about God – who he is, what he is, and what he is like, almost every time, our minds move in the direction of might and power. We see him as the great God of the universe, the creator of all things. He is so big, and we are so small. It is natural, I suppose, that our initial impression of him would be power.

In a poem called “The Creation”, James Weldon Johnson gives this graphic description.

“God reached out and took the light in his hands
And rolled the light around in his hands,
Until he made the sun;
And he set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun,
God gathered it up in a shining ball,
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with a moon and stars,
Then down between the darkness and the light,
He hurled the world;
And God said: That’s good.”

In poetic language, that is how we think of God-power. Perhaps you have heard the hymn entitled “How Great Thou Art”. It was written almost a hundred years ago, but most of its popularity has been gained in present times. The first verse goes like this:

“Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made.
I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
How great thou art, how great thou art.”

The reason for the popularity of that hymn is not hard to find. It reveals our fundamental concept of God-power. And that concept is definitely valid. When we consider the extent of our universe, we can't help but wonder about the Power that brought it into being and holds it together. But if we stop with this, we are going to miss some of the most profound truths about God.

In today's gospel reading, John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and called him “the Lamb of God.” Then later he said, “I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from the sky, and it came to rest on him.” The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the revelation of God. If we want to know what God is like, we have only to look at Jesus. Once he said to his disciples, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” And here in today's gospel reading, this one who is the revelation of God is compared to a lamb and a dove.

To get the full impression of that, we need to recall our own use of animal symbolisms. For many centuries, men have compared themselves

with animals in order to say what they believe about themselves. American Indians named their sons after the wolf, the bear, and the other strong and courageous beasts.

The most common use of such symbols today is seen in connection with athletic teams. Here in the United States, the National Football League is a classic example. Think of the names and the mascots of some teams: the Chicago Bears, the Detroit Lions, the Los Angeles Rams, the Carolina Panthers, the Philadelphia Eagles, the Atlanta Falcons, the Seattle Seahawks, or the Denver Broncos.

All of these names are intended to describe what each team wants to believe about itself and wants others to believe about them. Every symbol has to do with strength or courage, or both.

That is how it is with us humans. We like to stretch our muscles and show the rest of the world how strong we really are. We even do it on a national level. The symbol of the United States is the bald eagle. The symbol of Russia is a bear. The symbol of China is a dragon. All of which means that we are strong nations, and we want to be absolutely certain the rest of the world know about it.

Now come back to our gospel reading. Here is Jesus, the revelation of God. To see him is to see the Father. And what are the symbols with which he is described? A lamb and a dove. Can you image that? Can you picture an athletic team calling itself the lambs or the doves?

That is completely unthinkable. We are too impressed with bigness and power. We could never compare ourselves with a lamb or a dove.

This gospel reading is telling us something about God that we need to learn. It speaks to me of his gentleness. What else could a lamb and a dove represent?

Here is an aspect of the nature of God that most of us seldom, if ever consider. In our obsession with his power, we forget that he is strong enough to be gentle. Sure he created the world; but look at that world under a microscope, and you will see that it is a very delicate instrument. He made the mighty oceans, of course he did; but he also made the tiny dew drops that form on the grass early in the morning. He made huge redwood trees that may grow to heights in excess of 300 feet, but he also made flowers so delicate that they will wither at the touch of a finger. He made the giant condor that may have a wingspan of as much as eleven feet; but he also made the tiny hummingbird, that when full grown may be less than two inches long and have a body weight of about two grams.

The common analogy of God to be found in the Bible is a father. Many can equate that with gentleness. Some cannot because they never had a father who was strong enough to be gentle. But did you know that at least one time in the Bible God is compared with a mother? You will find it in Isaiah. There the Lord is quoted as saying, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you."

What a beautiful picture that is. Most of us have experienced it; all of us have seen it. A child is hurt, or frightened, or tired; so his mother takes him in her arms, holds him close, whispers words of love, and all is well. That is a concept of God that seems to us almost foreign. In fact, it may even seem like sacrilege.

We see God as power; but maybe we need to take one more look, this time through the eyes of John the Baptist. That old prophet looked at Jesus and saw a lamb and a dove. I don't know all that it means, but surely he must have been telling us about the gentleness of God. **Amen.**