

Sermon: How to Know God- Part 3 God of Peace

A Roman Catholic priest stood at the church door greeting the parishioners after mass. "Good mornin' Mr. and Mrs. O'Riley. I married you ten years ago but I never see any of your children in church."

"Deed you did, father. We've not been blessed. My husband and I have tried but we've not been successful", said Mrs. O'Riley.

"I'm going to Rome for a few years sabbatical. I'll light a candle for you in the great cathedral at the Vatican. Perhaps the Holy Mother will look kindly on you and your husband."

Several years later, back at the church door, greeting parishioners, the priest meets Mrs. O'Riley; "Mrs. O'Riley, did you ever have any children?"

"Deed I did, Father," she said pointing to a family behind her. "We've had a set of triplets, a set of twins and two singles since we last saw you."

"Praise be the Holy Mother. She's blessed you. But I don't see Mr. Is he here?"

"No, Father, he's gone to Rome to blow out your damn candle."

We have been studying the 7 stages of knowing God according to Deepak Chopra. (slide 1) The first week we looked at God the Protector, last week God the Almighty, and this week we are reflecting on the stage 3 level of knowing God, the God of Peace.

Which is a God we very much need right now, because more than ever we live in an age of anxiety. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, anxiety characterized as apprehension, fear or excessive worrying is the number one mental health issue in Canada and 25% of Canadians will suffer from excessive anxiety at least once in our lifetime. 25% of Canadians report they are highly stressed over work, finances, and now one of the new factors over which people are stressed are the environment and the unpredictability of world politics. Young people in particular are more stressed than ever and worried about their future and in fact suicide is the leading cause of death for young people in Canada because young people are so stressed by their lives. Human beings have always suffered from a sense of anxiety in our lives, often overwhelmed by loss and difficulty and struggling to find ways to cope with the anxieties of life. But

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climate change is increasing the severity and numbers of natural disasters in our world and with that comes an increase in anxiety. And social media heightens our awareness of these disasters so we are feeling more and more directly impacted. So where do we find our inner peace in the midst of a world that seems to be increasingly more chaotic. In Psalm 46 we hear the psalmist assuring the people that we do not need to fear the upheavals in our lives: “though the earth should change”, “though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea”, “though nations are in an uproar” and “kingdoms totter”, “God is in the midst of the city”; “God will help it when the morning dawns”, “God is with us”, “a very present help in times of trouble”, so “be still and know that I am God.” This is the awareness of the stage 3 level understanding of God, the God of Peace. Even though difficulties and challenges and changes and chaos may be all around us, threatening to overwhelm us, in the center, in the midst of us, in our innermost being, the God of Peace dwells within. And Psalm 131 offers us a beautiful metaphor of our inner souls resting in the arms of the God of Peace, describing our souls like the image of a small child resting against their mother and being quieted, calmed and soothed in a state of complete peace.

(slide 2) More than ever we need to know this God of Peace which Chopra characterizes this way: Undemanding, calm, offering consolation, conciliatory, detached, silent, meditative. Moving from a stage 1 God of angry judgment and the all-powerful God beyond us of stage 2, we enter into the still waters of the God of Peace within the soul in whom we find our refuge and our rest. This is the God that our nation hungers for, and so we have seen increasing numbers of people participating in yoga and meditation classes as people seek to know the God of Peace that dwells within. The UCC chaplain at University of Victoria was seeking to have a relevant ministry to young people and was trying every thing he could to peak an interest in spirituality with no success; few young people seemed interested until he offered a class on how to meditate because he realized how stressed and anxious the students were. 100 young people showed up to learn how to meditate. There is a spiritual hunger in each of us as people long to know

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a God of Peace in a world of chaos. Deepak Chopra reflects on this stage 3 aspect of Knowing God which he outlines this way. (slide 3)

As Chopra points out: "it hardly seems possible that this nonviolent deity emerged from stage 2 and that's because it didn't, because stage 3 transcends the willful, demanding God that once prevailed, just as the new brain transcends the old. It is by discovering that peace lies within does the devotee find a place that divine vengeance and retribution cannot touch. In essence the mind is turning inward to experience itself. This forms the basis of contemplation and meditation in every religious tradition." In the 1960s and 70s, experiments on transcendental meditation demonstrated that there is such a thing as the restful awareness response and in fact at the Menninger Foundation they established that some yogis could lower their heart rate and breath to almost nil. While physiologically they should have been on the brink of death, instead they reported intense inner peace, bliss and oneness with God. This is coming into awareness and connection with the God of Peace.

In December 1577, a Spanish monk in the town of Avila was kidnapped in the middle of the night and thrown into a church prison by members of his own Carmelite community because he had taken the wrong side in a fierce theological debate. As advisor to the Carmelite nuns he had committed the grave sin of giving the women permission to elect their own leader instead of leaving it to the bishop. This prison was like a small cupboard not high enough to stand in. Every day he was taken out to be fed bread and water and sardine scraps from the floor and subjected to torture by the monks who would walk around him and scour his bare back with leather whips. Torture was eventually reduced to "Friday only" but the beatings were so severed that his shoulders remained crippled for the rest of his life. How did he survive this horrific ordeal? He detached from his outer world and his torturers by entering into an inner state in which he encountered profound ecstatic experiences from the God of Peace. He begged for a pen and paper and began to record his profound experiences and wrote: on a dark, secret night, starving for love and deep in flame, O happy, lucky flight! Unseen I slipped away, my house at last was calm and safe...and there my senses vanished in the air. I lay,

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forgot my being, and on my love I leaned my face. All ceased, I left my being, leaving my cares to fade among the lilies far away." This monk was none other than St. John of the Cross, the author of the poem "Dark Night" who coined the expression the dark night of the soul.

This God of Peace has always been accessible and able to be known if we seek to take time to enter into stage 3. This is the God we all need to find and experience if we are to find the resilience we need to endure the challenges we face in our lives. This is the God who comes to us undemanding, longing not to be served but to serve and sooth our souls. This is the God that Jesus was talking about when he said: "the kingdom of God is within you."

I'm sure that most of you have at one time or another had moments when you experienced the profound presence of the God of peace...in prayer, in meditation, in the stillness of the night, in a loving embrace, in the flickering light of a candle or bonfire on a beach, or beneath a starry, night sky. The God of Peace enters into the human heart in those times we are seeking peace.

But sometimes in the midst of our daily lives, this God eludes us and some have never experienced this God of Peace and so I would like to take a moment now for us to rest in this God of Peace. In bible study last week one of the folks mentioned a song they knew that reminded them of knowing this God of Peace. It is written by Cris Williamson and sung by Shania Noll on her album *Songs for the Inner Child*. It is a song that encapsulates the beautiful image of Psalm 131 in which the child is being held and rocked by Mother God. We are going to play this song and I invite you to close your eyes and allow the words and spirit of the God of Peace to wash over you in these next few moments and allow your soul to rest and be quieted like a child in your mother God's embrace. *Play "Lullaby"* (play song/video)

Welcome to the profound inner peace of the God of Peace... may you seek to know this God throughout your day and week and life. May it be so. Amen.