

I've been loving this series finding beauty in the midst of our broken world. But this week when I started to tackle the subject matter I immediately fell in love with it. Those of you who have been a part of my congregation or have heard me preach over the years will know that one of my 'go to' names for God is Holy Mystery. The psalm this week speaks of this holy mystery. The name of God YHWH when f the Hebrew bible was a name you could not say. In the Judaism God is still referred to as HaShem meaning 'the name.' God, The Holy, YHWH is beyond labeling, beyond definition. When I pause in that thought the spirit rushes through me, a rush of unknowing of sacred wonder.

Wendy Farley says "The spiritual part of ourselves is a "divine abyss." It is a dimension that is not touched by words, thoughts, ideas and feelings. Our bodies were made for perceiving the beauty of the world—a flower, a kiss, a stunning and vibrant green hillside, a newborn baby. And yet all the art in the world cannot capture exactly what it feels like to experience the Divine nature of these things. The path of unknowing is to both savour what the senses can take in but also wonder at the mystery of unfathomable depths of even a single atom.

I am a person who loves wonder. There is so much in our world about knowing. Learning, knowing, acknowledging is critical, but being open to the unknown is what frees us up. In our scripture today in the midst of of praise and attribution, the Psalmist writes about idolatry. When we make idols or when we put our trust in idols, we risk becoming like them. There is so much idolatry in our world today, even in the Christian faith. I am not speaking against other faiths or other religions that have idols I am speaking of when we label, when we limit, when we possess our own understanding we in fact are creating an idol. When we label other people we often limit them, we put them in a category, like we know everything about them. That person is Dutch, that person has ADHD, that person is a player, that person is a Christian. Any label we put on someone is limited, it does not mean we know a whole lot about them at all. It is the same with God. Any metaphor we put on God is

limited. One of the ways we know God is through the senses, through our experience of God.

Even our experiences can be idolatrous. Think of a conflict originating in two people with radically different experiences of the same thing or event? Anytime we take some thing or idea and make it solid and immovable, we create an idol. Humans are so adept at this we can make something as malleable and fleeting as a feeling or experience and turn it into something to hold onto. These are the things that polarize that cause racism and discrimination, judgement and injustice.

Let me invite you to step back for a moment and think about something you love to do. Something you excel at. Is it dancing, music, hiking, knitting, writing, painting, gardening, cooking, exploring? That thing you do in which the experience is the whole thing, not the pondering or analysis of it.

Let me invite you in. When I get out on the boat sailing I feel the waves, the current, the wind, I hold the tiller, I watch the wind in the sail and I contemplate every move but it is not long before I am caught in the experience and I know the move to make with hardly a thought. It is the same when I paddle, I get in the boat and I feel the move of the sea beneath me. At first I dip my paddle in and figure out how it is going to feel but eventually especially in the midst of a race, the muscle memory kicks in and every part of my body knows how to move as if the boat and the team and I are one.

Sure I can analyze that later but it is the experience that I love, it is the experience that keeps me going back. Oh now I want talk about skiing.... It's the mystery, it's embracing and trusting the moment.

It is like being a true friend or a lover. No matter how long you have been with someone, no matter how much you know about someone there are always things you don't know. In fact being willing to be okay with the unknown is a part of a healthy relationship. If we constantly demand to know every thought or movement of a friend or a partner we stifle that persons freedom, we can choke the relationship. It's about the

freedom of love. (let me acknowledge that trust is also earned and so I don't want you to hear me say anything goes in a relationship and you don't have rights to ask or know).

Any explanation or metaphor is always limited. Any label we put on a person or on the Divine is always limited it is never full. If we can say to someone "I love you to the moon and back" or "I love you to the deepest depth of the ocean." We understand the sentiment but it is still limited.

The images, symbols and metaphors in our faith and worship point us towards God but they do not complete God. Wendy Farley suggests they are a threshold into the wholeness of the divine. The waters of baptism, the practice of the eucharist point us towards Holy Mystery. And yet when we get so absorbed in the definitions and practice and purpose of those things we can shut down its holy mystery, shut down the sacrament. We can't possess God in our rituals or thoughts or practices, when we attempt to do so we do violence to the sacred practice.

The contemplative life invites us into a different kind of engagement with God and creation. In the words of Dr. Farley, "God is not something to be seen or heard or grasped by reason. We manufacture images of God all the time. We become very attached to our images. But Divine reality created us in such a way that we can move outside seeing, hearing, reasoning, feeling."

Faith takes courage and trust in the unknown. When we doubt or question or are at a loss it isn't a loss of our faith it is a loss of a concrete concept. God is so much bigger than our perception of him. It is okay to feel lost. God will hold you even in the midst of your lostness, that is the depth of Holy love. In fact often it is in the lostness that we learn so much more.

There is so much learning to do. There is so much that we think we know that we need to un-know. God welcomes our constant reframing

and rediscovering. When we learn something new in our faith it is not about a lack of trust in God is is about a lack of trust in our perception of God. I always want to be that open in my faith so that I can continue to grow and learn and become whole.

Wendy Farley wrote “Made for the Beloved, we are created in such a way that we are capable of a deep intimacy with our divine Beloved. This intimacy which we write so much about, is far beyond any words...We touch this part of our spirit in prayer but we also connect with it when we sing or dance or give birth.”

“When we love Divine Goodness more deeply, we love the world more passionately. When we love and care for the world, we fall more deeply into divine reality. “God” is not just a magical being in whom we are instructed to believe, but the unnamable, infinite goodness that *we* know as love. When we love one another more beautifully, we enter into the divine realm.. Regardless of the words we use, the primary sign that one loves God is that one loves other people and the world itself.

The feeling of tenderness toward others is rooted in the source of compassion...” We know we are worshiping the divine Goodness by the fruits of our worship. Does our faith and worship bring us to Love, compassion, and social justice, the fruits of loving God? If not we need to question what we are idolizing.

The mystery of what opens the heart to this relationship with reality is unsolvable. Why do some feel the world so intensely – so aware of its beauty and suffering – while others are inert to it? That in itself is a mystery but as we encourage the contemplative practice of a life that leads us to compassion let us take time to engage the mystery of what we do not know. It might do all of us well to stop and spend some time journaling about what we don’t know and understand and then offering it up as a prayer - like a psalm of lament that ends with but you are God and I trust you. Open me up to discover new life.

Let us be open to Holy Mystery  
Amen.