

Come Together: Where is God?

John 4:5-42 March 27, 2011

Lent 3

I. Where is God?

A. Where is God?

In this Lenten Sermon Series on how we come together as Spiritual beings, this is not a question many folks may be asking; namely, “Where is God concerning the tragedy in Japan.”

Rather it is the more innocent and curiosity based question of early childhood.

The question is really literally wanting to know where God is;

what is the location of God.

B. Later on at the next level of spiritual development that occurs in later childhood and adolescence we will find the more philosophical question about “Where is God?” that will relate to theodicy or the presence of evil in relation to God’s power and goodness.

C. But in early childhood, we’re not quite there yet.

In early childhood we are still just trying to put our world together.

At this age kids don’t yet think in metaphor or symbol or in abstractions.

Their thinking is still very concrete; very literal.

For them to put God in a box is to literally put God in a container.

To say, “God is like a father” is to them saying, “God really is a father;” a big important religious guy who is a father. Is it any wonder so many kids at that age think I’m God. Go figure – huh.

- D. I remember our son Garret at that age when we once went to Disneyland and he saw Capt. Hook walking around and he was scared to death, because he didn’t understand that Capt. Hook was a fictional character and this person in front of him was just pretending; he thought it really was the evil, rotten, scoundrel pirate Capt. Hook.
- E. So a question very important to them at that age is “where is God?”
“You folks all keep talking about God, but where does God live?
What does God look like?”
And for some people, the answers they get at this age are the answers that will stay with them much of their lives.

- F. When you are told that God lives in heaven which is a place up there; even though we learn about geography and astronomy in school, somehow the images of God “up there” stick with us forever.
 - G. When young kids hear constant reference to God as He and God as Father, it becomes very difficult later on for them to move beyond these limiting, literal, concrete images.
 - H. But to be fair – they need to pin the label on something.
They need a concrete, literal answer because cognitively that is where they are; they are not yet able to think in more abstract terms.
 - I. But nevertheless, these images of God that we receive at that age become images that stay with us, even if at some point they become images that we reject or expand upon.
- II. And questions that we ask at that age are still questions we will be asking as adults;
questions like: “Why, Why, Why?”

A. Early childhood is the age of “why”.

1. Why is the sky blue?
Why do dogs die?
Why can't we fly?
How big is god?
Where do the colors of the rainbow come from?
2. I remember as we were in the process of moving back here from Long Beach, my daughter Annie and I were sitting in a high-rise hotel lounge. She was about five and we were having an interesting discussion and she suddenly asks, “How big is the universe?”
3. It is the time when kids are first trying to intellectually, not just perceptually, but intellectually, put their world in order.

B. And all those “whys;” “why, why, why?” They are enough to drive any parent nuts. But more than anything we can do to improve education in our country is to **encourage** kids to keep asking “why.” We should never discourage them from asking “why.” Kids come with a natural, built in curiosity and the great failing of parents and teachers is to discourage it, ignore it and not encourage it. Kids come with a natural desire, a thirst to

learn, but parents who are too busy or uninterested to care or take time and teachers who are too focused on inputting facts and getting through their agenda discourage and extinguish the fire of curiosity.

- C. Einstein was once asked in an interview why he was so smart and his reply was something to the effect that it was because he never grew up.
He said that he was still just like a little kid, he just kept asking, “Why?”
- D. The great minds have always been the ones who never grew up, but kept asking, “Why?”
And that is the case for questions of the spirit as well as questions about the world around us.
And some of the greatest minds among us have even found that these spiritual and physical questions may be the same questions.
- E. And so physicists who keep asking “Why” find that at the most fundamental level our cosmos is comprised of vibrating strings that are effectively bits of information that are shared in a matrix that may be some sort of

consciousness.

Recognizing of course that “consciousness” maybe too much of anthropomorphic projection.

- F. Questions of “where is God,” “how big is God” and “what is God” are not just the questions of small children; they are still the questions that the best theologians in our world are dealing with. Which is why you may find answering kids questions a little challenging, since even the pros struggle with them.

III. Speaking of theologians and religious teachers; these are even the kinds of questions that Jesus was dealing with as he spoke to the woman at the well.

A. Questions like:

1. “Where is God?”
2. “What is God?”
3. Or more existentially, for a woman who had had several husbands and was now living with another man;
“Do I have a place and purpose?”
“Is this all there is?”
“Does God love me?”

B. Without a doubt Jesus answers were to an adult and not a small child, but still his answers were an attempt to move her from literal, concrete thinking to a more abstract and metaphorical level of thinking.

C. Look at Jesus answers.

1. He explains that the things that bring salvation and meaning are not the material things of life but the spiritual.

Jesus moves her from literal water, to a spiritual water that he could give her.

"Everyone," he says, "who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty."

2. She had an impression that God could only be worshipped in a particular place; but Jesus said to her,

"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

3. She had a view of God as a thing, but Jesus tried to expand her thinking by telling her that the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

D. And as relates to this passage some folks will say, “Look, Jesus spoke of God as Father.” But they miss that Jesus clearly used this as a metaphor -- not a literal description. He spoke of the Father to the woman at the well, but then he clarified that God is far beyond any parental or gender descriptions and directed the woman and us to realize that God is something totally different. God is Spirit.

IV. Like the woman at the well, some adults are still stuck in literal and concrete ways of imagining God and are using the same images that they developed as a child.

But those childhood images really don't help us deal with the complexities of adult life and we have to change the way we think.

A. As the Apostle Paul said, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. “

B. For kids it is appropriate to give them answers that are very literal and concrete.

- C. But there is a problem when adults quite asking, “Why?” and they settle for the images they learned as a child and they think that there is nothing more to learn.
- V. So how do you answer the question, “Where is God?”
- A. Do you jump back to the simplistic answers you learned in Sunday School when teachers gave you a simple answer because that was all you were able to understand at the point?
 - B. The answer to the question for some folks is turn to atheism because the simple childhood answers don’t satisfy them and rather than looking for more satisfying answers, they just quite looking and avoid the whole matter.
 - 1. They figure out that those early answers were childish and are now un-meaningful.
 - 2. But then they fail to look farther or get help from folks who have dealt seriously with these issues and could help them to a new understanding.
 - C. The other response is to keep asking the questions.

- D. And you know what?
Hopefully you will never get a totally satisfying answer.
Hopefully, you'll just keep asking the questions and learn to be comfortable with a world where the answers keep changing.
- E. But that kind of world is also the kind of world where once in a while you just need to lay back and float -- float in the womb of God and realize that whatever the answers – God's still there and always will be.
Wherever "there" maybe.
AMEN.