

Elephants and Donkeys

John 14:6-7 October 16, 2011

- I. So this is probably the last sermon I'm going to do on the instant sermon questions.
 - A. There's still a few left and I'll see if I can deal with some of those issues in the context of other sermons, but this question did catch my attention.
 - B. So here it is, this is the question that someone asked,
"Was the columnist Mike Royko correct that Jesus is a Democrat and God is a Republican?"
 - C. So bear with me as I try to answer this question without getting into too much trouble.
- II. To start with –
 - A. I didn't know who what Mike Royko was when I read this question and so I googled him and discovered that I did know of him.
 - B. Mike Royko was a celebrated and Pulitzer Prize winning columnist in Chicago who recently passed on and now that he has passed may have the answer to the question I'm going to attempt to answer.

- C. Unfortunately, I could not find the source of his comment about Jesus and God and so I'm not really sure what he was getting at.
 - D. So, to whom ever wrote the question, forgive me if my guess and speculation totally missed his point.
- III. So this is where I'm possibly going to start getting into trouble, because I need to speculate based on stereotypical representations of God and Jesus; but first let me make the disclaimer that these stereotypical representations are not accurate.
- A. Now I'm going to guess that Mike was inferring that God is hard, strict, judgmental, unbending, unchanging, exclusive and prejudiced in favor of his own children who are all self-dependent, self-reliant and manifest God's blessing through their worldly success and that this also describes the elephants, a.k.a., the GOP, a.k.a., Republicans.
 - B. Next we have Jesus as soft, bleeding heart liberal, forgiving, nurturing, compassionate and inclusive of all folks and recognizing the

social matrix that makes up every individual and sees change in social transformation that is accompanied by political and economic egalitarianism; which then also describes the donkeys, a.k.a., the Democrats.

C. Since I didn't see Royko's column I don't know this for sure but I'm thinking he may have be coming off the work of George Lakoff on political metaphors.

1. Lakoff argues that the differences in opinions between [liberals](#) and [conservatives](#) follow from the fact that they subscribe with different strength to two different metaphors about the relationship of the state to its citizens.

Both, he claims, see governance through metaphors of the [family](#).

a) Conservatives would subscribe more strongly and more often to a model that he calls the "[strict father model](#)" and has a family structured around a strong, dominant "father" (government), and assumes that the "children" (citizens) need to be disciplined to be made into responsible "adults" (morality, self-financing).

Once the "children" are "adults", though, the "father" should not interfere with their lives: the government should stay out of

the business of those in society who have proved their responsibility.

b) In contrast, Lakoff argues that liberals place more support in a model of the family, which he calls the "[nurturant parent model](#)", based on "nurturant values", where both "mothers" and "fathers" work to keep the essentially good "children" away from "corrupting influences" (pollution, social injustice, poverty, etc.).

2. Lakoff says that most people have a blend of both metaphors applied at different times, and that political speech works primarily by invoking these metaphors and urging the subscription of one over the other. ^[7] [Wikipedia]

D. Now I'm not going to comment on the accuracy of these stereotypes, I will re-emphasize Lakoff's position that they are not indicative of every Elephant or Donkey and that most people are a mixture or blend of many of these qualities and all of the qualities of the elephants and donkeys could be good or bad, holy or unholy, depending on a given situation.

E. So where I do want to go with this is simply to say that if Mike Royko did say that God is a Republican and Jesus is a Democrat, that he is... wrong.

- F. So to answer the original instant sermon question the answer is no.
If Mr. Royko said this then he was wrong.
That is if one believes in, or trusts, Jesus.

IV. There is this concept in Christianity called 'the incarnation.'
It's kind of one of those few things in Christianity that really is necessary to believe at some level if you want to be a Christian.

- A. It is the idea that Jesus was the incarnation or embodiment of God.
- B. Now there are different understandings about how Jesus is the embodiment of God; from the notion that Jesus is fully God and fully human to the idea that Jesus was a human who was merely filled with God's spirit of love;
but if you call yourself a Christian then at some level you need to believe that Jesus is the embodiment of God.
Which in and of itself should make it pretty clear that God can't be an elephant and Jesus a donkey.
- C. As the gospel of John in our scripture this morning presents Jesus, God and Jesus are

one in spirit.

If you want to know the character of God, then look to Jesus.

- D. Keeping in mind this concept of 'incarnation,' I'd like us to look at another misunderstanding of many people that may lead them to think of God as a Strict Father and Jesus as nurturing and compassionate.
- V. Some folks have this notion that the God of the Hebrew scriptures, also known in Christian circles as the Old Testament, and the God of the New Testament, the Christian scriptures, are different Gods.
 - A. All the way back to the 2nd century some folks have had the idea that the God of the OT and the God of the NT were simply two different gods.
 - B. Some even believe that the Hebrew God is a lesser God and that Jesus revealed the true God.
 - C. These errors of the faith or heresies, as they are called, are caused by two mistakes people make.

1. First, they don't recognize that it is not a different god, or the same god changing, that is revealed in the scriptures, but rather what we see in the Hebrew Scriptures are the people changing.
 - a) This is to say that there are actually many, and sometimes conflicting, images of God portrayed in the Hebrew Scriptures and these reveal different peoples differing understanding of God.
 - b) Sometimes God is humanlike, at other times God is total mystery and unapproachable.
 - c) Sometimes God is strict, unmerciful, bigoted and totally unforgiving judge.
 - d) But sometimes God is all loving and compassionate protector of the orphans, widows, the oppressed and totally all inclusive in love.
 - e) Which leads us to the second mistake people make.
2. The second mistake is that they start with an image of God and then use certain passages to support their understanding and just treat the other passages as if they don't exist.
 - a) So if you start off with the notion that God in the Hebrew Scriptures is a strict judge and in the Christian Scriptures is a nurturing parent, then you tend to give

priority to those passages that support that position.

- b) The reality is, God is portrayed as strict judge and loving parent in both the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Christian scriptures, the New Testament.
- c) And I'm kind of making a mistake here myself because while the Jews don't recognize the New Testament as part of their scriptures, the Hebrew scriptures which Christians have traditionally called the Old Testament are part of our scriptures.
So my mistake is that the Christian scriptures really include the Hebrew Scriptures;
which is part of our recognition that we are not dealing with 2 different God's but just different historically influenced understandings of the same God.
- d) The Hebrew Scriptures don't reveal to us as much about God as they do about the evolving faith of the Hebrew people and their changing understanding of God.

VI. So now that we are at the point that there is only one God and Jesus is the incarnation, embodiment, or manifestation of this one God;

then is Jesus and God like a strict judge or a nurturing parent?

A. The quick answer is both.

1. When it comes to bullies oppressing those who are not bullies, God is presented as a strict judge.
2. When it comes to God's relationship with those who are not bullies, either through choice or oppression, God is presented as a loving, compassionate, nurturing, protective parent.
3. And the same goes for the presentation of Jesus.
 - a) When Jesus encounters those who oppress the poor, the sick, the powerless; Jesus is quite the strict judge and whether they are political oppressors or religious oppressors or spiritual oppressors, he has no problem dispensing them to the trash heaps of Jerusalem, known as Gehenna, a word that gets translated in our Bibles as "hell."
 - b) But when it comes to the dispossessed, the poor, the sick, the religiously or politically oppressed he is like a nurturing parent and to them he reveals God as forgiving Father, or like the woman who would not stop looking for the lost coin, the coin being symbolic for any who felt lost.

B. We see that there is a consistency for when God and Jesus are seen more as Strict Judge and when they are seen as loving, compassionate, forgiving, merciful, and nurturing Parent.

C. That consistency is that:

1. First, God and Jesus don't like bullies.
 - a) They don't like religious or spiritual bullies.
 - b) They don't like political bullies.
 - c) They don't like economic bullies.
2. And second, God and Jesus seek to empower those who are bullied.
 - a) Blessed are the poor.
 - b) Blessed are the meek.
 - c) Blessed are the oppressed and persecuted.
 - d) For your's is the Realm of God.

VII. So it may be that Elephants, in general, may prefer the strict father and Donkeys, in general, may prefer the nurturing mother, but God and Jesus aren't Elephants or Donkeys.

They are LOVE and love will do
whatever needs to be done to bring
value into our lives and to save all that
can be saved.
AMEN.