

Being-In-God

Have you ever read a passage of Scripture and thought to yourself, “I know there is something deeply significant to be found here, and if only I could think hard enough, or long enough, I could discover what it is.” This is how I feel about our Epistle lesson this morning. This particular passage has become one of my favorite verses. I can’t tell you how often I return to it in my mind, turning it over and over again, dwelling on its truth. It’s the last part of the passage that is particularly fascinating to me: “...so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being.” Whatever does Paul mean by this? I am certain He is touching on one of the great truths about God. After all, the concept of God is strange, is it not? Just think about the idea of God for a moment. Now think about how we usually talk about Him. We are so limited by our human speech; our vocabulary just isn’t big enough to do Him any justice. And when we are finally forced to say something about God something gets lost in translation. The minute we try to express our thoughts, they vanish. God is too big—or maybe He is too small, that He somehow slips the noose we try to put around Him. What I propose to do this morning, then, for better or for worse, is just to give voice to my inner thoughts.

Let’s begin with the great paradox every thinking Christian must face. Paul captures it well. We search for God, and yet God is always near to us. Strange. I suppose this is why God is so difficult to know. God encompasses us, surrounds us with His presence, and yet we can never step back and see God. God is too close for us to gain any perspective. We are overwhelmed by His immensity. So, any definition of God must include an impossibility of defining Him. Nothing greater than God can be thought, this is true, but God is still somehow greater than any thought we humans can think. This makes God both very close to us and very distant from us. So close that we live and move and have our being in Him, as Paul says, yet so distant that we can never describe God adequately. All things depend on God, but God does not depend on anything. He embraces us and holds us in existence, but we cannot embrace Him in return. And while we are at it, here’s something else to consider. We look for God, and yet God is not in space and time. This makes Him rather difficult to find, don’t you think? What are we searching for then? Would we even know Him if we found Him? After all, God is not a concept to be grasped or figurative form to be imagined or an object to be handled. God is everywhere and yet nowhere. God

is everything, and yet can't be reduced to any one thing. We confess with Paul that God permeates all things, but all things are certainly not God. If we place God too far away, do we not become Deists, thinking of God as some watchmaker, who winds up creation just to watch his handiwork tick down from a safe distance? If we place God too close, do we not become Pantheists mistaking God for trees and rivers and mountains? Perhaps, since we live and move and have our being in God, the best approach would be to study ourselves? If God is in us, doesn't that make us Divine? A healthy dose of introspection or self-examination then might be just what is needed to turn up the very God we are searching for? But that won't do, either. Christ is very clear about this approach. We shouldn't fold human experience into God. God is not like us. We must deny ourselves and flee to Christ. But here again, 'flee to Him' poses a bit of a problem. It seems we are right back where we started.

Truth is, we will never be able to know God fully by being rational. We must let go of rationality. There are no mathematical proofs, which will ever satisfy our sinful minds for too long. We must abandon even our quest for God. We must stop moving and be still, stop talking and listen. But this is hard for us. We are busybodies; we go anxiously about trying to be something or do something or accomplish something in this life. We are full of noise, and our minds are chaotic. We must escape the racket of our thoughts, if only for a little while. We must put aside the cares of this world that distract us. We must enter into that inner chamber of the soul, shut out everything, and having locked the door behind us be still, live with our thoughts, and in the words of the psalmist: "know that God is God". Not a rational knowing, mind you, but a knowing by the Spirit of God. "By this we know that we remain in God, and that He remains in us, because He has given us His Spirit", as St. John puts it in his epistle; which is to say, only God can reveal God. Only He can arouse our minds to a contemplation of Himself. For He alone made us for Himself; He alone fills our beings with His Being. Only God can gather our attention that we might seek God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Do we find God or does God find us? I don't think it much matters. God is with us and we are with God. This is the answer to the question that was never really a question at all. Amen.

In Christ,

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