

I Am

We begin with the wonderful comforting assurance that God "is" — that God exists.

That God wishes to be known as "I Am," which is to say, "I Live", I Am real, I Am not a figment of your imagination.

"I Am" sets the stage for what Really Is.

But with only that, the stage is quite bare, because God remains a mystery: hidden and unknown.

God travels concealed in pillars of fire or behind smoking mountaintops in the older testament.

Moses himself is only permitted to see God's backside as it were, never God's face.

And in the face of this mystery, we humans do what we humans do.

Unhappy with mystery, we return the favor, creating god in our own image.

And so for centuries we attribute to God all kinds of petty nationalisms and prejudices, bigotries and biases, all, we say, true expressions of this mysterious "I Am."

And God, quite clearly, is saddened by our lack of insight, our reluctance to sit quietly in the lap of mystery, our refusal to trust this God who assures us "I Am."

And so God decides at long last to show us God's face.

It is the face of Jesus.

And in the face of Jesus, meaning, in what Jesus says and does, his wisdom, his healing, his embrace of the least, the lost and the left behind, Jesus not only assures us that "I Am", he discloses to us the very heart of God's nature: self-giving, self-sacrificing, love.

A love that pours out like water from a rock, a love that takes chances on all of us – like a kindly farmer who gives the unfruitful tree another year; like seed scattered wildly, trusting that some, in due time, will bear much fruit; like a father constantly scanning the horizon for his long lost son – and when the boy finally stumbles home, he is consumed by the welcoming arms of the one who loves him.

And yet, as we sit here in the presence of this God who loves the unlovable, waits for the undeserving, who longs for everyone to come home, I know some of you wonder which holy place will become the next monstrous shooting gallery that churches, mosques and synagogues have become.

From the bombed out Cathedral in Egypt during Holy Week to the shooting in the Philadelphia synagogue, from the Carolina Bible Study massacre to last week's atrocity in New Zealand, we are living in an age where division and fear are metastasizing.

Enemies are defined as those who don't look like me, speak like me or worship like me.

"Us against them" it seems, is humanity's original sin, arising out of our fundamental inability to distinguish good and evil, right and wrong.

Indeed, it's an amazing thing that almost no one, no matter the horror they inflict, sees themselves as doing wrong.

We all, it seems, live in the world we design.

The New Zealand shooter lives in a world where what is precious to him, white people and so called white culture, is threatened.

In his mind, he's not a murderer, but a warrior, a soldier, a hero.

ISIS fighters are the same — they have defined a world where God blesses the killing of all who veer from what they define as "the true faith."

Hard truth be told, this is the way we all live, unless we are transformed.

And so for we Americans, it's fine and dandy that our large corporations exploit those in the developing world, because, well, I like my 99 cent bananas and those three dollar shirts made in Bangladesh.

While the vast majority of us recognize the imminent threat of climate change caused by our love affair with fossil fuels, a threat not only to our way of life but to life itself, few do much of anything to demand the necessary personal and systemic changes that must happen soon or catastrophe will undoubtedly occur.

It is this self-absorbed mind set that both Paul and Jesus take on today.

This is the stage upon which today's readings take place.

First there is Paul reflecting on the bad end many of our mothers and fathers in faith came to because they were not transformed.

Then there is Jesus being hit with those fundamental questions we still ask today: why do bad things happen to good people?

Or when bad things happen, does that mean I'm a bad person?

And the response that Jesus (and Paul) makes to all of this is: repent!

NOT "repent" as in clean up your act, fly straight, follow whatever rules the current climate calls for.

'Repent' "doesn't mean feeling sorry for yourself for doing bad things.

It doesn't even mean 'change the direction in which you're looking for happiness,' although it's often translated that way." Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus*, 37.

The word Jesus uses is "Metanoia," which is better translated not as "repent" but as a plea, an encouragement, an ultimatum even, to "enter into the Larger Mind" — "to go into the larger mind." Id., paraphrased.

In other words, return to I Am, because now, in Jesus, we can turn to him face to face.

In Jesus, God has revealed exactly who God is, and what God is like, and therefore who we are, and who we are destined to become.

Because the nature of God is self-giving, self-sacrificing love, then a life lived in the flow of self-giving, self-sacrificing love is the only life that ultimately brings peace, joy and contentment.

Stepping outside of that flow, while it may seem fun for awhile, in fact results only in division, misery and pain.

Recognizing this truth is what happens when we meta-noia, when we enter into the larger mind.

The time to do so is now.

“The human race is facing a major crisis.

It is a crisis of conflict between ideologies, between beliefs, and of unsustainable environmental and economic systems.

And this crisis, at every level, begins with our erroneous collective belief that we are disconnected from God, and are therefore disconnected from each other, and therefore from life itself.” N. Walsch, *A Conversation With God*, 188, paraphrased.

And yet, the same power that brings you here week in and week out whispers to us all that we are not disconnected, that we are indeed not only one with each other, “like the cells of every body are intimately connected, but we are one with all that is.

Our physical selves, on close examination, reveal that the rocks and the trees and the planets and the sun and the moon, and us, are all made of the same stuff!

Like beautiful snowflakes which come in an infinite variety of shapes and sizes, all that is consists of the same substance, a substance that shows itself in a variety of combinations and concentrations, while remaining, the exact same substance." Id, paraphrased.

And what is that substance that produces all physical things?

It is star dust.

We, and every material thing that exists, are all made of star dust!

But it doesn't end there!

While physically we are star dust, spiritually, we are One with the Cosmic Christ, the great I Am who permeates all that is.

The same I Am who reveals himself to Moses in the bush, is, in Christ, the "I Am" who makes her home in all that is.

"The divine mystery and miracle of existence is laid bare in the unique existence of each atom, each galaxy, each tree, bird, fish, dog, flower, star, rock, and human.

As the profound German mystic Meister Eckhart says, 'in this breakthrough — I discover that God and I are one.'" Fox, The Cosmic Christ, 154.

Through Christ we too become united with "I Am" which puts "being before doing or having or proving.'

As Meister Eckhart puts it, 'people should think less about what they should do and more about what they are.'" Id at 155.

“To experience compassion and to identify with the suffering of others — as well as with their joy — is to experience the Divine One who suffers and rejoices in and with each person.

To give birth to one’s own I Am is to enter into the divine I Am.

This is our heritage.

This is our destiny.

As we discover our own I Am, which brings with it both the joys and sufferings of ‘God with us,’ we gradually grow into an ‘I Am — with others,’ just like Emmanuel, ‘God — With Us.’

As we grow in compassion, the divine I Am takes on flesh once again.

And while God alone is the Compassionate One, as we grow in compassion, as we grow in mercy and kindness, so we also grow into our own divine nature.” Id., paraphrased.

We are living in times where powerful forces seek to alienate us from one another.

May our prayer be this day that we return to the truth, to our hidden destiny, and recognize in all things, the ties that bind us ... one to another ... so that we may be One with each other, and One with God.

+amen

