

Myth

A Lutheran pastor was running a book study a few months ago and got herself into some hot water.

As the class talks about different genres of books: science fiction, biography, autobiography, someone pipes up and asks: "what genre does the Bible fit into?"

And the pastor immediately responds: "Mythology!"

Everyone in the room gets real quiet.

The pastor quickly changes the topic.

But she's right.

The problem is, we don't really understand what "myth" means.

We think of myth as fiction, things we hope might be true but know are not.

For most folks, myth is what's up on the movie screen, it's superheroes, cartoon characters.

But in fact, as this pastor later argued in a magazine article, myth is the sum and substance of that which is Really Real.

It's how we mark out, live out, and define our lives.

Myth is the very thing that structures our values, our hopes and dreams and aspirations, and ultimately the very society that we build and live in.

Without myth, there is no human life.

And so yes, we live in a world of myth.

When people speak of America being the greatest nation in the world, God's special gift to the world, that's myth.

When those on the left envision a society where goods are shared, where each receives according to her needs and contributes according to her abilities, that's myth.

That capitalism is the most efficient driver of human well-being — is myth.

So you can see, myth is anything **but** unreal or unbelievable.

Myth is actually how we structure our day to day lives.

But which myth we choose to live by can and does have wildly different consequences.

We see that playing out in our daily news as the president continues to refute his loss.

He's promoting a myth of rampant and systemic corruption that robbed him of his hoped for "overwhelming victory."

The consequence of that myth is distrust in our electoral system, distrust of our democratic form of government.

The point being, the myth that we choose to devote our lives to — matters.

Myth is like worship.

Just like it's never a question of **whether** we shall worship, only **what or whom** we shall worship, just so, it's never a question of whether we shall choose a myth to live within — only **which myth** shall we put our faith and trust in?

Today, in Mark's gospel, the writer invites us to throw our lot in with the myth of Jesus.

In Jesus, we are invited into a world in which God takes centerstage.

Always and everywhere.

Never leaving us alone.

A world in which God is so in love with every human being that God becomes human.

Lives, breathes and walks among us.

So that one day, we may live, breathe and become ourselves, one with God.

It's a story, a myth, that shifts our gaze from anxious, often neurotic worries over day to day survival, and asks us to take the broader view.

It reminds us that no one is asked their permission to be born.

No one knows the day of their last breath.

Meanwhile, the time between those two events becomes ever shorter the longer we live.

And this fact invites us to focus on the bigger picture of life.

I once said, quite wrongly, that the difference between Christianity and say, Buddhism and Hinduism, is that Christianity sees time with a distinct beginning and ending, whereas the other great faiths see time as circular, never ending.

In fact, we too experience time as circular as we every year re-experience our church year, starting with Advent, moving to Christmas, then Epiphany, then Lent, then the Easter season, followed by what we call "ordinary time" – all ending up once again with Advent.

And like our Hindu and Buddhist sisters and brothers, it's not an endless merry-go-round.

With every season, and every year, we are called not to go far, but to go deep.

The repetition is intended to take us into the depths.

When we're just getting started, we read the stories quite literally, wanting it all to be scientifically provable.

We can even become quite rigid about what is "true" and what is not.

But as we continue, season after season, year after year, we begin to find the lines softening.

The edges get chipped away.

As we slowly discover the deepening Mystery that holds all things together.

Instead of seeing the Bible as God's dictation to humanity, we begin to experience it as a record of a long conversation between God and humanity.

We stop using the Bible to determine what love means, and instead use love to determine what the Bible means.

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," as Mark begins his story, is all about God coming to be among a people far too wrapped up in ritual and power struggles.

A people who have forgotten where they come from — and what their true destiny is.

A people very much like us today.

And to those people, and to us also, Jesus brings something new.

Through water and the Holy Spirit, he comes to restore us to our original truth, our original calling, by placing us back in our original myth.

One that sees the world and all that is in it as the beloved treasure of God.

One which sees every person as a miracle, a creature made in the image and likeness of God.

As Brian McClaren puts it:

“I believe that the Spirit of God works everywhere to bring and restore aliveness—through individuals, communities, institutions, and movements.

Movements play a special role.

In the biblical story of Exodus, for example, Moses leads a movement of liberation among oppressed slaves.

They leave an oppressive economy, journey through the wilderness, and enter a promised land where they hope to pursue aliveness in freedom and peace.

Centuries after that, the Hebrew prophets launch a series of movements based on a dream of a promised time.

A time of justice, when swords and spears, instruments of death, shall be turned into plowshares and pruning hooks, instruments of aliveness. Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3.

Then comes John the Baptist.

A bold and nonviolent movement leader who dares to challenge the establishment of his day, who calls people to a movement of radical social and spiritual rethinking.

Then a young man named Jesus comes, siding with John’s movement through baptism, and John says,

“Here he is!

He’s the one!”

Under Jesus' leadership, the movement grows and expands in unprecedented, unimaginable, ways.

It rises again through a new generation of leaders like James, Peter, John, and Paul, who are filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

They create learning circles in which activists are trained to extend the movement: locally, regionally, even globally.

Wherever activists in this movement go, the Spirit of Jesus is alive in them, fomenting change and inspiring true aliveness.

Christianity begins as a revolutionary nonviolent movement promoting a new kind of aliveness, on the margins of society.

It claims that everyone, not just an elite few, have God-given gifts to use for the common good.

It exposes a system based on domination, privilege, and violence and proclaims in its place a vision of mutual service, mutual responsibility: the peaceable kingdom.

It puts people above profit.

It makes the audacious claim that the Earth belongs not to rich tycoons or powerful politicians, but to the Creator who loves every sparrow in the tree and every wildflower in the field.

It is a peace movement.

A love movement.

A joy movement.

A justice movement.

An integrity movement.

An aliveness movement." B. McLaren, We Make The Road By Walking, modified.

This is our story.

This is our myth.

May we embrace it.

Live it.

Share it.

And revel in it!

For when we do, we too shall witness "mercy and truth meeting together; righteousness and peace — kissing each other."

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