

January 7, 2007

Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Sermon: "What Kind of God Do We Worship & Serve?" Bob Jack

Text: *"For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."*

A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they drew pictures. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's art work. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, "I'm drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

Without missing a beat or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

Have any of us ever seen the face of God? Of course not. God is Spirit, the Bible tells us, invisible, distant, and not comprehended by mere mortals, such as you and I. So, how is it possible for any of us to say that we believe in God, when we have never seen God? Can we believe in that which we have not seen?

The old joke about the little boy who, when he was told by his mommy to wash his hands before supper to get rid of the germs, muttered under his breath, “Germs and God, God and germs, that’s all I hear around here, and I’ve never seen either of them.”

Maybe you’re here this morning because you want to get closer to God. That’s your New Year’s resolution. Maybe you even wish that you could see God. How do we come to know God?

Allow me to give you a little lesson in theology. The word *theology*, of course, means nothing more than “the study of God.” And one of the greatest of Christian theologians was a man named St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived in medieval times. St. Thomas believed that God’s existence could be demonstrated clearly to anyone by using his five basic proofs.

The first and most evident proof, he said, is **the argument from motion**. When you and I look around us we notice that some things are in motion. But anything that moves, Thomas said, has to

be moved by something else, because nothing moves except it is caused to move by another mover. God is the Prime Mover.

If you see a ball move from one place to another you are justified in thinking that some force, external to the ball itself, caused it to move. Who causes the planets and the stars to move in their courses? God does, that's who.

The second of Thomas's proofs is **efficient causes**. Everything that exists – the sun, the moon, the stars, you and me – is caused by something else, because nothing can create itself. Life, therefore, must come from some creative force, some cause, beyond itself. Once again, that *something* is God.

The third proof of God's existence is a consideration of the **possible and the necessary**. Among all the things of this universe, you and I discover that there are things which are capable of existing, and things which are capable of not existing. Things have a beginning, and then a lifetime, and then that lifetime is corrupted and decayed, and they pass out of existence. If, therefore, things that exist are also capable of not existing, there must have been a

time when they didn't exist. Something had to have brought them into existence, and that necessary being, prior to all other beings, is God.

The fourth way of proving God's existence is to consider the **grades or stages** which are found in things. Thomas observes that there are grades of goodness and truthfulness. When you and I speak of something as good or better, there must be something that is best. "More" or "less" are applied to different things, according to different degrees of considering what is greatest of all: So, hot...hotter...hottest. There must be something which is most true, and most good, and most noble, and consequently exists as being in the highest degree. If some things are good, and some things are better, even best, there must exist a being who is perfection, who causes all these lesser grades of being to exist. That being is God.

The fifth and last proof is that which considers the **government of things**. All things that live seem to live with an intention, moving toward some end or purpose. Flowers turn toward the sun, human beings turn toward love. Where does this

intention come from, Thomas asks? All beings must be directed by some higher being, even as an arrow is directed by an archer. This intelligent being we call God.

Now, I don't know about you, but interesting though these five proofs may be – and they are interesting from a philosophical standpoint, and they may even impress your friends in casual conversation at a cocktail party, and maybe even flabbergast those other folk who have always believed that your deepest thoughts center around bass fishing or tossing horseshoes. As interesting as these proofs are, they seem rather cold and remote and analytical.

The God that is “proved” in Thomas's system is an abstract God, and the force behind that kind of God is more like gravity than like love. On the other hand, the God of the Bible is a much more interesting personality than the God that is demonstrated by Thomas's proofs. His proofs may give you and me, as Christians, a little more in the way of assurance for what we already believe, but they're not going to do much to convince skeptics and unbelievers that there is a God.

The Bible reminds us in so many ways that the God we worship and serve is not only awesome and majestic and holy, but that he is personal and closer to us than our next breath. I need only remind you of the great poetic cadences of the Gospel of John where, from the get-go we are told that no one has ever seen God. The only one who is able to know God is the one who has seen God, who was with God from the very depths of eternity, who is indeed God himself, the Word made flesh. This God has a face, has a name, has a personality, and we call him Jesus. If it were not for Jesus, the Bible declares, you and I could not know God.

You see, our faith is a revealed faith; a revealed religion. What do I mean by that? I mean that you don't get Christian faith by delving deeply into the depths of your psyche. You don't get Christian faith by sitting in the lotus position contemplating your navel. You don't stumble upon it doing long walks into the woods, immersing yourself in nature sounds. It is not something that arises out of our common human experience.

Christianity is a revealed religion. All that we know of God comes to us as a gift from God. If God did not choose, out of love, to reveal himself to us then we would not know God. We would be sitting in the dark, still, attempting to give voice to our inmost yearnings to find God. We would be wandering in the recesses of our own limited imaginations when we use the word *God*.

John's Gospel begins with the declaration that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." What John is saying is that the Eternal Word, who was with God from the very foundation of the universe, who was indeed God, became one of us humans, and was born in a stable in Bethlehem, had a human family, knew Mary and Joseph as parents, and had a name – Jesus.

You and I can only say something like, "God is love," because we have first seen that love demonstrated in Jesus. In Jesus, Christians believe that we have seen as much of God as we ever hope to see. And ever need to see. As John puts it, "It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him

known.” The Son, who is next to the Father’s heart, has graciously revealed to us the true nature of God.

Most of us believe in God, most of us come here to sing hymns of praise to God, beloved Christmas carols. Most of us pray, and give, and serve God only because God has come to us in Jesus. Most of us believe, not on the basis of a philosopher’s list of proofs, but on the basis of our undeniable relationship with Jesus. Jesus has come to us, so that we might come to God. In Christ, on Christmas, God Almighty reached out to us. The Holy One of Israel came to us as our Savior. God with us; Jesus.