

## **Who is this King of Glory? -- Pent+8**

In her class on the Hebrew Bible, Thursday, Lenny quoted the introduction to a chapter on Chronicles. The author explains how the seemingly dry and unbelievable narrative of the two books by that name serves as a typological mirror to our civilization, showing us who we really are, what we truly represent and perpetrate. "It is theology, powerfully and persuasively inculcating three doctrines: 1. That human life exists under the overruling of an immutable moral order ordained by God. 2. That observance of rightful forms of worship is of paramount importance to the community. 3. That God's revelation is given, not only in past time, but in the present – a living word of truth."

This summation of the ideas behind the stories is a clear and elegant description of the theology of faithful living. Firstly, as with the Hebrew prayer from Deuteronomy: "Shema, Israel, Adonai elohenu; Adonai echad." "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is thy God; the Lord is One." In addition, as doctrine number One goes a step further to point out, we have not created ourselves, and neither can we change truth. If there is, and there is, a power that can do these things, it ain't us; it ain't ours. God may be in us or around us, but God is not us. Why the Shema is said so frequently is that we are pathologically prone to forget this fact.

As for Number Two, we sing and pray and study and read and talk in church because we know that is the only way to sustain our community of faith for the fulfillment of our Great Commission. We don't worship because God needs praise to function, we worship because we need to be reminded of Number One – God is reality and we are her subjects; we are

subject to reality -- and this is our joyful and compassionate way of doing that reminding. We say the Lord's Prayer about as often as Jews say the Shema, and for the same reasons. Lest we forget who's God.

Which brings us to the third of the three ideas that the Chronicler inculcates or drives home: "That God's revelation is given, not only in past time, but in the present – a living word of truth." In other words, there is not only the history of God's deeds in the past, and what attempts we – in our stiff-necked way -- have made throughout history to understand, capture and mold that reality for ourselves, as if we were God. There is also the observation that whatever godly truths we think we have apprehended, through scripture, in tradition and by reason, God continues to create, and, if we would flourish as godly beings, we must make it our life's business to stop, look and listen to the author of creation, who is ever creating anew.

It follows that God's reality is inestimable, unfathomable, and demanding of our continual refreshment and revision of our interpretations of what God wants or what reality is. Human society must advance spiritually if the species is to survive. Ultimately, there is one truth: that gentility, generosity and compassion are the only things that will save us, whereas violence, greed and retribution will surely doom us. This is why Jesus says all the law and the prophets hang on the intertwined and interdependent skyhooks of God and Love. This is why every mainstream religion has a version of the Golden Rule.

I am reminded of the legend of Rabbi Hillel, one of the founders of modern Judaism, who lived around the turn of the millennium. Not the last one nor even the one before that; he

died in the year Ten. Apparently Hillel and Shammai two of the great elders of their time were approached by a Gentile who asked them to tell him all there is to know about scripture while he stood on one foot. Shammai laughed at the man and told him it was utterly impossible to do such a thing and turned away. When the man turned to Rabbi Hillel, he spoke thusly: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to anybody else. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; stay and learn."

All the rest is explanation. Which means all the rest is interpretation. Our purpose is to continually interpret ourselves, our laws and our allegiances in the way of that orientation. Our vocation is to pursue whatever means we can discover of hastening the coming of a peaceful age. Our joy is in the possibilities that are created each time we take a step – personally or publicly – toward a time of concord and plenty for all.

We must remain teachable. Society must act on what it has learned, rather than deny uncomfortable or inconvenient truths, such as these. Shema everybody, hear, O world: God is God, and we need to be reminded of it. And God's plans for an epoch of peace are constantly being revealed, so remain teachable; keep your eyes and ears and hearts and minds open, for more is being revealed all the time, through social justice initiatives and new laws – not obsolete ones being reintroduced. More is being revealed in Science and Medicine every day. More is being revealed through individual transformation; through episodes of Golden Rule compassion, kindness, moderation, assistance and sisterhood. Shema everybody.

After all, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; God has founded it on the seas, and established them on the rivers” and painted it in the skies. And “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false,” whose embrace of reality is recognized as the only means of their salvation. “They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from God.” So “Get with it,” the psalmist declares; “Civilization changes.” It must continue changing until it reaches the point of concord and plenty and equal liberty for all. If it fails to change, it will fail to thrive. The universe will have to produce another species to replace ours. They will be a species who thrive on beauty and justice and truth, as we theorize ourselves to be, but this time with more humility. If we don’t change ourselves, we will always continue to do the same things wrong, and we will not survive. God will have to take another whack at it... this time with more humility. And maybe no TV.

Here is an example of Golden Rule theology come to life:

It was after nine in the morning of June 7, 1958, and the Air National Guard’s jet precision team, the “Minute Men” were flying at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, just outside Dayton, Ohio.

For the Minute Men this was just another show, and they were happy the skies were clear, the air was morning-smooth, and thousands of viewers would see the show.

Captain Johnny Ferrier flew an F-86 Sabrejet for this Denver-based team. After a routine maneuver, Ferrier’s plane began rolling out of control, and he was in trouble. Seeing him headed

right for a residential neighborhood, his commander gave the command over the microphone. "Bail out, Johnny, bail out!" There was still plenty of time and plenty of room for him to bail out. The Colonel even issued the command twice more. Each time he was answered by a blip of smoke. He grasped the sense of it immediately. Ferrier couldn't reach the mike button on the throttle because he had both hands tugging on a control stick that was locked full-throw right. But the smoke button was on the stick, and he was answering the only way he could-- squeezing it to tell Williams he couldn't let his airplane go into the houses of the neighborhood.

Captain Ferrier's Sabrejet hit the ground equidistant from four houses. There was nowhere in the vicinity other than that one backyard garden where he could have hit without killing people." He valued others' lives as just a little more important than his own. And that was all it took to save them.

On a small card he carried in his wallet wherever he went, are the following words: God First, The Other Fellow Second, and I'm Third.