SERMON NOTES AND GOSPEL TALK — July 23, 2023

The basic argument: Jesus the Messiah was sent into the world to reveal both true divinity and true humanity. Both truths depend on each other. We human beings can never hope to see and hear and understand how we evolved with false notions of God at the center of our religions and cultures, unless we understand the true story of our human evolution which Jesus came to reveal.

The views and experiences of God with which we evolved are largely projections of our own needs and wants. They justify what we choose to do in our cultures. Most importantly, these gods justify our use of *force* to dominate other peoples and our environment. Our gods are the rubber stamp to how we see our group, our nation, our culture.

But what if the true God is love? Love never uses force to get its own way. (Watch video clip of the *Star Trek: Next Generation* episode "True Q," beginning at 31:34. "You can't force someone to love you.") If God is love, then God has to allow the freedom in nature (which on the level of lower complexity is randomness and chance) and especially the freedom human beings, made in God's image, to not return God's love if we so choose. We are free to not love as God loves — which is to say that we choose not to love everyone and everything. Instead, we choose to use force, when the circumstances allow us, over others and our environment. That seems like freedom to us — the freedom to, at least in some cases, force our wills onto others; or to be relatively free *from* others forcing their wills on us. Freedom, according to our false gods of force, is a zero-sum game relative to the freedom of others.

But for the God who is love, freedom is a matter of the whole. Freedom is a group achievement gained through lovingly serving one another. No one can ever be truly free until we are all free.

Discuss the part of today's sermon about perceiving God as someone who controls everything that happens in the universe — including such things as my getting cancer or suddenly losing a loved one to an accident, illness, or violence. Is that idea of God challenged in today's readings?

> From Romans 8: [20]for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope [21]that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.
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> From Matthew 13: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; [25]but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

If the Christian anthropology we have been learning is correct, then that enemy has been us. We evolved with false gods who justify our use of force to dominate others and our earth home.

And if this is the case, then it's going to be something almost impossible for us to see and hear and understand.

Case in point: the missing verses from the Gospels the past two Sundays. We have skipped reading some verses in between Jesus telling the parable to the crowds, and then later offering an interpretation to his

disciples when they are alone:

> Then the disciples came and asked Jesus, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He answered, "The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn — and I would heal them.' — Matthew 13:10-11a, 13-15
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> Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 13:34-35).

The name of René Girard's most important book? *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Girard proposes that humankind never would be able to see the false basis for our cultures and religions without Jesus having let himself be a victim of it, and then God vindicating him through the resurrection.

Can we discuss some of the crises facing us in today's world? Such as white supremacist racism, christian Nationalism, and climate change (especially the mass migrations it's causing that hook into the other two crises).

<u>Racism</u>
Lurking behind white supremacist racism has been a god who rubber stamps the domination of white people over people of color. (See, for example, Genesis 9:18-27, which has been used by white people to justify slavery.) White people need to honestly ask themselves: do any thoughts reside deep within that say things like, "Well, the history of the past 500 years show that white people have had the technology and weaponry to dominate other peoples. Doesn't that mean God created us to be superior and so put us in charge?" Are these the kinds of thoughts behind the Florida school board suggesting that there was "personal benefit" to enslaving African peoples?

The God of love who Jesus reveals to us is actually the exact opposite of this. God created us all equal and calls us to the true freedom of caring for one another. And the best way to make sure that all people are being cared for is to care for the most vulnerable at any given time or place. ("I was hungry, and you gave me to eat. . . .") "The first will be last, and the last will be first." Jesus inverts and flips everything. Also, St. Paul's main mission is to unite the whole human family, Jew and Gentile. Isn't that to oppose racism in the 21st century?

christian Nationalism: the view that God has put christians in charge of the world.

<u>Climate crisis</u>: justified by the view that God put human beings in charge of the rest of creation to use as we see fit. Challenged by Jesus who shows us the true freedom of lovingly serving — not by taking charge in ways that tramples on the inherent value of all of God's creation.