

THIRD SUNDAY - JANUARY 14, 2015

INTRO: I LIKE WHAT ROGER KARBAN, A PASTOR IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS SAYS IN A COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S READINGS IN A RECENT NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER

HE SAYS, "TECHNICALLY THE BIBLE ISN'T A BOOK. IT'S A LIBRARY; A COLLECTION OF BOOKS, EACH CREATED IN A SPECIFIC LITERARY GENRE (OR STYLE)". UNLESS WE KNOW THE CATEGORY OF BOOK WE'RE READING WE WON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT WE'RE READING. WE DON'T READ A NOVEL THE WAY WE READ A BIOGRAPHY, OR A COMIC BOOK THE WAY WE READ A HISTORY BOOK....

OR THE COMICS THE WAY WE READ THE SPORTS SECTION OR AN EDITORIAL....

ISN'T THAT TRUE?

WE CAN'T APPROACH ALL SCRIPTURE WITH THE SAME MINDSET - OR ASSUME EVERY TEXT IS A FACTUAL REPORT OF WHAT HAPPENED THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO...

WE BELIEVE THAT OUR SACRED AUTHORS WERE CERTAINLY INSPIRED TO CONVEY THEIR IDEAS OF HOW THE DIVINE WORKS IN OUR LIVES - BUT LIKE ALL AUTHORS THEY WERE FREE TO EMPLOY DIFFERENT LITERARY DEVICES, FOR EXAMPLE NARRATIVE, POETRY OR SONGS... THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF JOHAH CHOSE SATIRE....

AND WITH THE RECENT TERRORISM IN PARIS WE'VE HEARD A LOT ABOUT SATIRE IN JOURNALISM.....

UNFORTUNATELY, IN THAT RECENT EXAMPLE WE HAVE SOME PEOPLE

TAKING THE SATIRE LITERALLY....

BUT SATIRE IS NOT MEANT TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY AND THE BOOK OF JONAH IS NOT MEANT TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY....

E.G. EVERYONE KNOWS PEOPLE CAN'T RUN AWAY FROM GOD, FISH DON'T SWALLOW PEOPLE AND ALL ASSYRIANS NEVER ACCEPTED JAHWEH AS THEIR GOD.....

THE AUTHOR'S THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE DOESN'T REVOLVE AROUND THE STORY'S HUMOR, IRONY, EXAGGERATION OR RIDICULE BUT CENTERS IN THE READERS' VICIES, SINFULNESS....

LIKE US AND BELIEVERS THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES, OUR

ANCESTORS IN FAITH FELL INTO THE TRAP OF CREATING MENTAL

IMAGES OF THE DIVINE BEING WITH WHOM THEY COULD RELATE....

THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE KNOWN WHAT YAHWEH LOOKED LIKE, BUT THEY WERE FAIRLY CERTAIN OF HOW GOD BEHAVED.....

FOR THEM YAHWEH'S PERSONALITY WAS PRETTY MUCH

PREDETERMINED - LEAVING LITTLE OR NO ROOM FOR CHANGE,

SURPRISE OR DIFFERENCES TO DISCOVER....

ROGER KARBAN CONTINUES....

THE FICTIONAL JONAH REPRESENTS THOSE OF US WHO HAVE

SQUEEZED YAHWEH INTO OUR OWN MENTAL BOX, OUR LITTLE IMAGE,

AND THEN ARE FORCED TO CONSTANTLY DEAL WITH YAHWEH'S

SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE ATTEMPTS....ALWAYS SURPRISING US...

HOW DO WE RELATE TO A GOD WHO REFUSES TO STAY WITHIN OUR

IDEAS OF GOD????

OF COURSE, JONAH IS NOT HAPPY ABOUT GOD'S CHANGE OF HEART....

HE IS LEFT HOLDING THE BAG, AS IT WERE....

***GOD CHANGES HIS MIND WHEN NINEVEH (A CITY IN IRAQ) REPENTS AND
JONAH IS NONE TOO HAPPY ABOUT IT....***

***JONAH HAD TOLD THEM THAT YAHWEH WOULD DESTROY THEM
BECAUSE OF THEIR SINFULNESS..***

***NOTHING IS MORE DEVASTATING FOR A PROPHET THAN TO HAVE GOD
GO BACK ON HIS WORD - THE WORD THE PROPHET HAD ORIGINALLY
BEEN COMMANDED TO DELIVER....***

***IF FOLLOWERS OF GOD CAN'T DEPEND ON GOD'S WORD, ON WHAT CAN
THEY DEPEND??? WE MIGHT SAY..***

***BUT AS WALTER WOLF, AN EXPERT ON HEBREW PROPHETS SAYS: GOD
DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FAITHFUL TO GOD'S WORD AS LONG AS GOD IS
FAITHFUL TO GOD'S PEOPLE'***

GOD'S RELATIONSHIPS ALWAYS TRUMPS GOD'S WORDS....

AND THAT'S TRUE OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS ALSO, ISN'T IT???

***WE'VE ALL HAD TO CHANGE OUR WORDS, AT TIMES, TO MAINTAIN A
MEANINGFUL, LIFE-GIVING RELATIONSHIP....***

***IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT RELATING TO THE DIVINE WE MUST GIVE
OUR GOD ROOM TO CHANGE, TO SURPRISE US AND TO EVOLVE AS OUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND/OR HER CHANGES AND EVOLVES...***

OUR SACRED AUTHORS BELIEVED THAT THEIR GOD ISN'T SOME

UNIVERSAL STATIC FORCE - ALWAYS RESTRICTED TO DO THE SAME THINGS IN THE SAME WAYS - PROBABLY LIKE THE ONE WE ONCE LEARNED ABOUT IN A CATECHISM - WHOSE PERSONALITY ALWAYS STAYED THE SAME - A PERSONALITY WE CREATED IN OUR YOUTH...

THAT'S WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT IN OUR GOSPEL PASSAGE TODAY... JESUS' FIRST FOUR DISCIPLES ARE SIMPLY CALLED TO FOLLOW HIM - A PERSON.

THERE ARE NO DOGMAS TO MEMORIZE, NO INSTITUTION TO JOIN, NO PHILOSOPHICAL OR THEOLOGICAL TENETS TO PROFESS.

THEY ONLY HAVE TO MAKE PEOPLE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE FISH AROUND WHICH THEIR LIVES HAVE REVOLVED....

OBVIOUSLY, THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHERE HE IS TAKING THEM....

IN ADDITION, THEY ARE COMMITTING THEMSELVES TO A LIFETIME OF DISCOVERING WHO THIS GALILEAN CARPENTER REALLY IS....

AS WITH JONAH, ALL THEIR PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS WILL EVENTUALLY BE JETTISONED...

HE WON'T TURN OUT TO BE THE MESSIAH THE VAST MAJORITY OF JEWS WERE EXPECTING....

SO, IT'S BEST TO HOLD ONTO OUR IMAGE OF THE DIVINE VERY LIGHTLY AND BE WILLING TO ADMIT HUMBLY WE ARE RATHER IGNORANT IN THAT REGARD..AND NOT KNOWING IS OK.

***BUT HOPEFULLY, LIKE THE DISCIPLES WE WOULD BE WILLING TO
SPEND THE REST OF OUR LIVES SAYING "YES" TO THIS ITINERANT
PREACHER AND LIKE THEM WILLING TO LEARN FROM HIM AND ADAPT
OUR VALUE SYSTEM TO HIS VALUE SYSTEM***

***SO LET US PRAY THAT WE NOT TAKE OUR IMAGE OF THE DIVINE TOO
SERIOUSLY...***

***BUT WE DO TAKE SERIOUSLY OUR WILLINGNESS TO BE OPEN AND
SURPRISED IN THAT RELATIONSHIP...***

***AND ESPECIALLY BE WILLING TO LEARN HIS VALUE SYSTEM AS
EXPRESSED IN THE GOSPELS AND DEVELOP AND ADAPT OUR VALUE
SYSTEM ACCORDINGLY***