

My daughter has given up on prayer.

When her Nana died of colon cancer four years ago, my daughter told me that she had prayed to God that Nana would be healed. She wasn't.

When her Papa died of colon cancer just a few months ago, my daughter again had prayed to God that he would live, because now that Nana was gone, it wasn't fair that both of them had to die, and all she really wanted was to have one of them at her weddings, and perhaps the future birth of children. He died suddenly and fast.

I don't blame Laura for giving up on prayer.

I don't think her world-view and her God-view are yet big enough to accommodate God. She hasn't had time enough just to catch her breath in between these two losses, let alone to adjust her understanding of God.

I am pretty sure that most of you pray to God the same way. You ask for God to intervene in your life or in someone else's life, usually for the best of reasons and with the best of intentions. We feel helpless and we need God's help. When it doesn't turn out the way we had hoped, instead of finding a new way to pray or a new way to understand God, we just give up. The world is turned against us, the universe is cruel. God doesn't really love us.

To my daughter, now that enough time to grieve has past, and to all of you who do not understand why God doesn't hear your prayers, answer them, or intervene when you think God should:

This is what I want to say: it's time to let a new vision of God claim YOU. It's time for us all to adopt an alternative worldview and an alternative God-view that is consistent with our best hopes for the next seven generations, our deep desires for justice and peace, and our belief in the persistent renewal of life in creation.

Gone are the old outdated concepts of God.

No longer can we picture a sentient being in human form, sitting on a throne somewhere in the sky, dispensing judgement, sending people to heaven or hell, or somewhere in between.

Gone is the clock-maker God, who set the whole universe in motion, who wound it up at the time of the Big Bang, then stepped back to let it all unwind, without noticing or caring.

Gone is the God who would micro-manage our affairs, like a puppeteer in the sky who would manipulate and control our lives through some undisclosed divine plan.

Gone is the father-knows-best figure, the man in the flowing robes, chastising and punishing those children who mis-behave, then standing guard at the gates of righteousness, letting only the chosen few through.

We have to let this God go if we are to have a future. The idea of a controlling, manipulative being OUT THERE, an omnipotent powerful human-like being is no longer affordable in our world at this point in time.

In fact, the divine mystery, the life-force of the universe, the powerful locus of energy that exists somewhere on the edge of our consciousness, has nothing at all to do with our anthropocentric and anthropomorphic projections. God is NOT ever going to be WHAT we want God to be.

What's required today is a complete transformative shift in the way we view, understand, and relate to God. I would submit that our very survival as a species depends on it. Not to mention our survival as a congregation living in the wilderness time of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Do you remember the movie **Apollo 13**, with Tom Hanks? The lengthy movie portrayed a landing on the moon aborted due to mechanical and electrical failure. It was a dramatic and gripping story. Did you know that there was an Apollo 14 mission? Can you imagine plunking yourself on that rocket, after what had happened to the previous mission?

We are so programmed to expect the worst! We are so ready to give up, I'd be willing to bet not one of us would venture forth as did those Apollo 14 astronauts. Nevertheless, it's that kind of frontier courage that I believe is required of us in the church these days. Not only are we survivors of the wilderness, as we learned last week, but we also have a mission to accomplish while we are here. A learning mission.

Edgar Mitchell was one of the astronauts on that spacecraft. No one remembers him. He and his partners landed the lunar landing module safely, returned home, and went on with their lives. Except that for Edgar Mitchell, the journey was all about profound personal transformation in his worldview and in his God-view.

It makes sense that Mitchell was a physicist, a scientist of the highest order, a grad of MIT, an engineer. No one would think of putting in space someone who wasn't trained to make good reasonable scientific responses to problems that might occur, such as happened on the previous flight.

It's interesting to note that the same is often true in most academic (including theological) realms: we never think of putting someone in there who isn't trained to see things the way they have always been

seen. Typically, we send each other out into the wilderness with the same tools, the same rationale, the same thought patterns and the same expectations as we have for literally 1000's of years. We expect that the faith journey of today is really just an up-dated carbon copy of the faith journey of our forebears. We are surprised when the preacher says we may NOT be able to read the stories of Moses and his band of followers in the desert, and make direct application to our struggles today. We expect that, because it is our adopted worldview, our accepted view of Bible texts. And woe be to anyone who would try to tell us otherwise. I find it incredibly ironic that church people are often vociferous if anyone should stand up and challenge their view of something in the Bible, even though the very same people have never read the Bible themselves.

Edgar Mitchell was trained with a scientific worldview. But HE was the one who took those famous pictures of the little blue planet, spinning in orbit around the sun. He was the one who kicked off a whole generation of ecologists. His vision of a fragile blue ball has become for us the defining vision of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

Listen to these words from the scientist when he literally saw the world in a whole new way:

It was an experience of connectedness. It was an experience of bliss, of ecstasy, the type of experience that brings tears to your eyes, you don't know why. Tears of joy, not sadness. It was so profound. I realized that the story of ourselves as told by science, our cosmology, our religion, was incomplete and likely flawed. I recognized that the Newtonian idea of separate independent discrete things in the universe wasn't a fully accurate description.

Edgar Mitchell, through a flash of insight and a transformative vision, was changed forever.

So was his idea of God, of religion, of science.

His vision helped open up the world of what we call in theological circles: ***process theology***. This is the radical view that God is in process of creating the world, as we are living in it.

For most of us, this is a new and entirely uninteresting thought. But it has changed my life completely too. God, according to process thought, is creative and responsive. God continues to create us and respond to us, as God has created everything in the universe, and responds to everything in the universe. There is a dialectic we have with God, a conversation, a process, that is open, engaging. Some people even go so far as to say that God is conscious process, and the task we have for ourselves is to become conscious of this consciousness.

Most of our theologies reduce God to something small. They are reductionist theories created by minds that were not able to think large enough. It was through no fault of their own: these worldviews were mostly all conceived in the time before we realized that our planet is a small orb spinning in a vast interconnected web of solar systems and galaxies. Now we know how inadequate those thoughts were. Now we see our anthropocentrism being as outdated as Copernicus' idea that the sun does NOT revolve around the earth.

Now we see that we are in process of discovering God all over again.

I wanted to share this with you today for one main reason and it is this: that the wilderness wanderings of God's people are often seen as wasted time! It seems like wasted time to us, unproductive, going nowhere, like a period of interim ministry when you are waiting for something new to happen and just want to get on with it. We portray the wilderness as a dark and cold place, a time without meaning or purpose, not as a learning growing time. It is, like the desert, a time to be got through. In our congregation we feel that. We have had many interim journeys and we feel we have started this wilderness journey over and over again, but we have never quite figured out how to get to the promised land. We worry that maybe we never will. It seems there is always a setback.

But here's the deal: In the desert experience, the people of Israel had to re-learn what it was to be a people of faith. The desert for them was not a homogeneous experience. In fact the stories are told over and over by different authors, even within the Bible, because they each have a different way of understanding what actually happened there. The end product, the story, was a synthesis of many other stories, a patchwork quilt.

It's not all that different today, though the stakes may be higher. We need to find new ways for understanding our story as God's people.

The old idea of God, controlling the universe, manipulating world events, stepping in to intervene when it is convenient for us (forgetting that our joy is often someone else's sorrow), just isn't adequate.

We must lose it and adopt a more open, loving, relational consciousness to the Divine. We must find the divine name, that open-ended verb I AM, written on our own hearts and in our minds, and more importantly, embedded in our own spiritual DNA.

Standing in the desert with his worried flock around him, Moses wonders if there is any way he can slake the thirst of his people. They are ready to throw stones at him, that's how angry disillusioned and frustrated they are.

But what the Bible fails to mention is that in the middle of the Sinai peninsula, not all that far from Mount Sinai, the final destination of Moses and his wandering band, is the **Wadi of Feiran**.

What is the Wadi of Feiran, you ask???. It is an oasis. It is the largest oasis in the Sinai desert. It is four miles across, and contains the largest collection of palms and fruit trees in the whole Middle East, a veritable Garden of Eden.

Did the Wadi miraculously appear, the whim of a capricious interventionist God who plays with people's lives?

Or was it there all along, just not visible until Moses got up onto the rock so that he could see a little further in the distance?

Love, whether human or divine, does not control or manipulate.

Love opens a space where new possibilities can take root, and give life.

When we pray to LOVE, (and this what I will tell my daughter who has given up on prayer), when we pray to the energy of creative love, the EROS of the Universe ,as Alfred North Whitehead referred to God, a way will appear.

The power of love, creative responsive love, is to make a way, where it seemed there was none.

My friends, this will be our journey. This will be our pilgrimage. We are travelling through unknown territory. We have to let go of many of our preconceived ideas. We have to admit we don't know the way. We have to look for signs that will take us each next step. We have to trust when everything within us is willing us NOT to. We have to expect that the way will appear. AND, we have to stake our future on these hopes.

If God's name truly is I AM who I AM, which also means, I WILL BECOME WHAT I WILL BECOME, then surely we who are God's people can risk a little letting go and trust that our GOD-in PROCESS is luring us forward, in order for us to become what we will become.

In the wilderness again, we will become people of a new God.

MAY IT BE SO!!!