

What God Do You Worship?



To ask the above question is something I hesitate to do, as it can intrude on a relationship which is a private and unique one for each person. I do not want to do this, but rather to explore possibilities and perhaps disclose fresh truths about our loving God, which may guide our lives and ministry.

The picture above of the hen contentedly sitting in my arms, may seem to have no connection with a discussion about the nature of God. However, I suggest that her peace can reveal that she and I have a close relationship, and that my love for her has its source and presence in God's love.

As God is Spirit, we do not and can never fully know what God is like, but in Matthew 11:27 we are given some help. Jesus said, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Here in this life on earth, it is Jesus, God incarnated as a human being, who revealed God to us in his words and actions.

As children, we may have been taught that God was an all powerful judge, or a gentle Jesus to whom we could chat. Perhaps God for us as Christians is now a somewhat puzzling God, yet still one that loves us and cares for us.

In the Gospels, Jesus was not a condemning judge or bully in his relationships with people, but someone who talked to others, listened to them, asked them

questions, taught them through stories and presented to them the truth of God's love.

Jesus grieved when others suffered, and healed many who were sick. All people were accepted and loved by him —women, men and children, Gentiles and Jews, Roman soldiers, Pharisees and tax collectors. People who had sinned, like the woman caught in adultery in John 8:3-11, and Peter who denied knowing him in Mark 14:66-72, were forgiven and helped to move on in their lives. Even the thief dying on the cross beside Jesus, was loved and forgiven when he asked for help. In the end Jesus gave his life out of love for others. God is definitely presented by Jesus as a God of love, but is this love restricted to human beings?

Recently I have been reminded in my reading and by noticing several dogs attending a funeral, that the God who created us out of love and who loves all people, also created and loves animals and all of nature which surrounds and supports us, and with which we interact. Accepting this knowledge of God's love can affect the way we, as people made in God's image and members of Christ's body, relate to the non-human part of God's creation.

Jesus became one of us, and this is expressed in John 1:14 as, "the Word became flesh." The 'flesh' mentioned here being that which we humans, including Jesus, share with many animals. In Mark 11:1-10, Jesus as the Messiah, came to Jerusalem among a cheering crowd of people, sitting on a donkey that had not been ridden before. What was the relationship between Jesus and this donkey, we might ask?

In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-35, it was probably a donkey that assisted the Samaritan to rescue the wounded man lying 'half dead' on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Birds are also mentioned by Jesus. When talking to the crowds in Matthew 23:37, he likened his desire to protect and care for the people of Jerusalem, to that of a mother hen gathering her chickens under her wings.

Animals were obviously close to Jesus, but so was the land and sea. In Mark 1:12, before starting his ministry, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Also, just before his arrest, in Luke 22:41, we read that he went apart, knelt on the ground and prayed among the trees

on the Mount of Olives, a place he knew well. I suggest that these were not just opportunities to communicate with God, his Father, but also, times when he felt supported by, and at one with nature. Perhaps his walking on the water in Matthew 14:25-33 also affirmed his bond with creation? Such actions may reflect the close connection First Nations people feel with Country.

If all creation is loved by God, what about God's redeeming act, is it only for people? In Romans 8, it seems that humans are not the only beings redeemed by Christ, but that the whole creation is waiting for the time when, as in verse 21, "itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

A God who loves all creation, directs us to love, respect and care for not only other people, but our whole planet and its life, working with it for the healing and wellbeing of all. When we love and appreciate earth, water, sky, plants, dogs, cats and even a hen, we shall go through times of suffering, but also much joy. The genuine loving relationships we experience with all others here on earth are part of God's love.

To sum up, the God we worship is certainly a God of love, whose very being of life-giving eternal love is the source of all true love, and encompasses the whole of God's creation, human and non-human.

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