

The following are the notes from my sermon on Jan. 21/18. It may be helpful to know that I often speak from somewhat incomplete notes, and I seldom follow my notes exactly, so they may not seem entirely clear. Listening to the audio may (hopefully) provide a better picture of the sermon.

Dwight

I Am Becoming

Who is God?

We all have images in our minds of who God is. These images come from many places. They come from the denomination we belong to, the church we attend, people we talk to, books and articles we read, or just thoughts. They are a result of the society we live in and even a history we may or may not be aware of. For example, many here have ancestors that were severely persecuted, and that persecution led to the shaping of beliefs. The fact that Mennonites are very involved in disaster relief and service projects, mostly for marginalized people, can be traced back to their history of persecution. There is an understanding of what it is like to be mistreated, and therefore desire to help those that are in similar circumstances. God is seen as one who cares very deeply for the poor, persecuted, mistreated, abused, unloved and uncared for. Our actions then are directed by our belief of who God is. Personally, I agree wholeheartedly, but is God only that? The world is full of denominations, each with their own view of who God is and how we should live. The bible has been interpreted in so many ways, and God is so beyond our understanding that how can we possibly know? Is it possible to know? Is God like an old wise man, a judge, someone who doesn't care at all, a tyrant, unfair ruler?

(Here talk to 4 people who have distinct views of who God is and thus how we should act)

1) God is explained in the Bible so we need to focus on reading and learning so we know exactly who God is. And we KNOW EXACTLY who God is. So stay with me and study!

2) Many people don't know God, so we should all go out and preach to them. So come with me and let's go.

3) God cares for those that can't care for themselves so we all need to go out and help as much as we can. So come with me and let's go.

4) I don't think we really can know God because it is far too complicated, and the church has messed it up so often so we really shouldn't try because we might mess it up too so just don't pay too much attention to any of it.

5) God is Spirit so let's just sit around and let God speak to our hearts, and we will understand everything then, so quiet and listen!

6) The world is so full of horrible things and I can't believe that a god would let that happen, therefore there is no god so eat drink and be merry.

7) I come from the Muslim faith and so we must pray 5 times a day. So we must do that. Come and pray.

These are oversimplified and overstated, but you get the point. How do we sort this out?

First, I would like to say that just because we don't know everything doesn't mean we can't know some things. I am married to a wonderful, beautiful woman, Wendy. Do I know how everything inside her works? As I look at her do I know how all the complicated systems within her function, like blood and chemicals and nervous systems and how the brain controls movement. The processes of sight, sound, thought, memory, emotions? Maybe I understand them a bit, but just a bit. Does that mean that I can't know her? Not at all. If I am aware of the things she says, body language, the work of her hands, her history, traumas in her life, how she interacts with others, I begin to understand who she is and how to live and enjoy life with her. We can also go to someone who knows about communication and learn from them, and we did that, and we learned about each other. I believe there are some ideas here that apply to knowing God. If I don't assume I know everything and am open and curious, I can see who God is through others, and how they know God. I think one of the worst changes that happens as we age is losing our sense of curiosity. God has created a world beyond description, explore. (example of picking up a basket and putting something from the above 7 scenarios in it). Another example of this is how I have changed since

being here. (class in seminary about the fall example). Therefore maybe I can go back to all those that knew something about God, learn from them and take away something that fills the desire within to know who God is.

Second, I would like everyone to know about my right arm. Look at the scars on it. What do they come from. There are many. They look like they come from “cutting”, the act of cutting myself with a knife or blade. What does that stem from? Mental health issues? Self-esteem? Pain on the inside that I can’t deal with. These are all real things that happen with cutting. Does that make a difference in how you treat me, how you talk about me, what you think of me (be sensitive)? However, the marks are not from self-cutting, but from a tool at work. Not having all the facts, or an incomplete understanding can lead us to incorrect assumptions and often a harmful way of living and interacting. I like what Joe had to say about this. He said that you can have a bullet-proof theology (idea about who God is), but if it results in harmful treatment of others, your theology isn’t bullet-proof. Jesus said Love the Lord your God with all you are, and love your neighbor, whoever that may be, as yourself. Everything hangs on this. So, I think we need to study and observe and try our best to understand who God is, while being aware of how we treat others. That is the litmus test.

How about if we look at some scripture and see if we can learn something about God. Read Exodus 3:13-15. The Israelites had been in slavery for a long time, and God was about to rescue them, lead them out to freedom. He meets Moses at the burning bush and explains to the less than enthusiastic man, that he, Moses, will lead the people. Moses wants to know God’s name, not just to know what it is, but what name to tell the people he is about to lead. This is rather important when we hear the answer. God replies, “I AM WHO I AM”. So God is who God is. So what. God is always the same, never changes, always was, didn’t have a beginning. Really how helpful is that? What difference does that make to those people who have been enslaved for 400 years? I don’t know if that statement gives much hope. I have never really understood this statement well.

To really understand this name of God let’s go back to the original Hebrew language of the bible.

I AM: Hayah haw-yaw. A verb. To exist, that is, to be or become, to come to pass, be committed, continue, do. It is always emphatic. Emphatic means forceful,

insistent, significant, strongly marked, clearly or boldly standing out. The translation I AM shows little of the original meaning. The believer's Bible commentary says that a better translation would be "I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE", or I WILL BECOME WHAT I WILL BECOME". The idea is that God will be or become what the Israelites needed. I find that this brings much deeper understanding to the particular situation. I will be what you need. I believe that by this name God reveals part of His inherent nature. The name by which the Israelites called God was Yahweh which comes from Hayah, a name so holy that they didn't pronounce it or spell it in writing, so it was shortened to YWHH. No one is even 100% sure how it is pronounced anymore, but Yaweh is probably correct. By the 9th century bc writers combined it with Adonai to make the word Jehovah meaning Lord. I think this was mistake. They were, I believe, supposed to remember the name Hayah and Yahweh, THE ONE WHO WILL ALWAYS BECOMING WHAT THEY NEEDED. That doesn't mean whatever they wanted. When King David took another man's wife and murdered him, Yahweh sent a prophet to call David on what he did, and there were consequences. It wasn't what David wanted, but what he needed.

Other names for Yahweh were introduced in the old testament. When the Jewish nation had been conquered and carried away by the Babylonians, the prophet Ezekiel delivers a message from Yahweh about a time when their city would flourish. Ezekiel calls God "Yahweh Shamma", the Lord who will be there.

David gives this name in Psalm 23 "Yahweh Roi" The Lord is my Shepherd. There are many other extended names for God in the old testament, and if we add them onto the name Yahweh the meaning is rich. I Am The One Who Becomes Your Shepherd. The idea is not that God changes, but that we allow Yahweh to be that in our life. I love the idea that we have a deep need of God in our lives, and that is part of who Yahweh is. The one who fills the deep needs in our life.

Sometimes we don't really know what we need, and Yahweh will call us what through something that changes us. My calling here to WMC where much of I thought of as sacred was challenged. My view of God has changed because of all of you. Story of ethics class in seminary. The fall of man and how it is viewed by many. It is true, but first God created all and it was good. So view everyone as

created in God's image just like you. Silence in the class. It is good to have ones' beliefs torn down and examined. I would encourage everyone to try it.

Let's skip to the new testament. Read John 10:7-11. Whenever Jesus uses this phrase I am, He directly connects himself with God, Yahweh, the One Who is Becoming. Jesus the Good Shepherd is the same Shepherd Yahweh is in the Old Testament. Whatever God is, so am I Jesus is saying. So if we want to know who God is, let us look often to Jesus. Jesus is the image of God.

The bible also says that we are also made in the image of God, so who should we be? Should we not also be the ones who become what others need? I can see that here in our midst. The people that are involved with the refugee family we brought here. They became what was needed. There are examples from all of us here. Examples from my family, Nadine, Matt, Jordan. What should couples, husbands and wives, partners be to each other? Story of Scott at work??