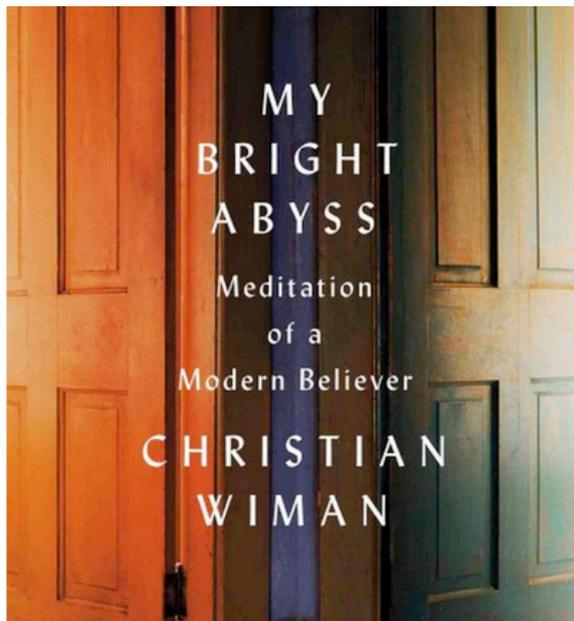


Sunday: Ascension, Cycle C, 5.8.16
 Scripture: Acts 1:1-11/Eph 1:17-23/Lk 24:46-53

THE GOD OF GLORY – BEYOND & WITHIN

In his book, *My Bright Abyss*, poet and author Christian Wiman, writes eloquently about what a viable contemporary faith might look like. I think his words speak to the mystery of Our Lord's Ascension that we celebrate today:

Lord, I can approach you only by means of my consciousness, but consciousness can only approach you as an object, which you are not. I have no hope of experiencing you as I experience the world – directly, immediately – yet I want nothing more. Indeed, so great is my hunger for you – or is this evidence of your hunger for me? – that I SEEM to see you in the black flower mourners make beside a grave I do not know, in the embers' innards like a shining hive, in the bare abundance of a winter tree whose every limb is lit and fraught with snow. Lord, Lord, how bright the abyss inside that “seem.”



In the beginning we hear of God setting the stars in their places, exploding galaxies into existence and hurling the power of light. Yet, we also know the story of God scooping up mud from the bank of a creek and breathing life into the lump of clay. One, a scene of **unimaginable power**. The other, a scene of **intimate tenderness**.

We know the story of Abraham hearing a vague call from the unknowable God floating on the desert wind, as well as the story of Sarah laughing at the casual conversation of some unexpected divine visitors dining at her table in a tent.

Awesome mystery

.....Comfortable companionship.

The Scriptures are full of such incongruous scenes; the joining together of ideas and notions... that are otherwise miles apart, diametrically opposed, or intrinsically unrelated. And today's Feast of the Ascension of the Lord is a good example of the same. Christ ascends into the far reaches of the heavens while, at the same time, promising to remain with his followers even to the ends of the earth. At our First Eucharist celebrations last week and this week, even the Eucharist Prayer for Children prayerfully but simply reminded us of this paradox:

*Jesus lives now with you in heaven,
 but he is also here on earth among us...*

Logically incongruous? Yes.

But **faithfully harmonious** all the same

In the Christian mind, God's majesty and God's intimacy are *complementary*, not *contradictory* ideas. In fact, we're so accustomed to holding together these disparate notions that we hardly notice the fanciful interplay of these two basic experiences of faith in today's passage from Ephesians.

In that stirring passage we find a description of what we already innately know: that in the Spirit, the *surpassing greatness* of God's power is communicated directly to the hearts of believers like us! that the One who is seated above *every authority and dominion in every age* is bodily present in the lowly group of people known as the Church! Today we need this reassurance more than ever, in our world torn apart by war, in our Church scarred by scandal and slow to reform, in our hearts which so often match the description of the disciples in Matthew's gospel: *they worshipped, but they doubted.*

This is the hybrid experience we call faith: the recognition that the God which no one can grasp actually resides in the inner recesses of our soul. From the fiery explosions at the edges of the universe to the breath of life blowing upon the damp clay of the earth, we reach for the mystery of God only to discover that we are already held within the mystery of God. From the day that the Lord ascended into the gray mists atop a mountain to the crimson fire and driving wind of Pentecost, we disciples strain to see a vision of God only to be blinded by the brightness of God.

What sort of faith do these extremes produce? What sort of mindset does this paradox create? You know quite well. It produces a type of faith that is able to see a reflection of the majesty of God nestled within the body of a baby cradled in the arms of her mother on this Mother's Day. It sees the glory of God in the spectacular scene of Mt. Diablo unfolding before you as you drive east on 680 even in the snarl of traffic and the rush to get from one appointment to another.

That paradoxical faith is there in the hope and struggle of the poor as we support Catholic Charities, Contra Costa Interfaith Housing, and the myriad of programs our

contributions fund, or work for more affordable housing for all people.

It sees the passion of God in the athletic accuracy of a three-pointer shot in a Warrior's game, as well as the wisdom of God in the hands of an elderly parishioner praying the rosary during Mary's month of May. It is a faith that revels in the majestic sound of choirs in cathedrals of stone as well as in the quiet humming of a child doing homework at the table in the kitchen. It knows that the Lord dwells in unapproachable light, yet the same Lord beckons your soul into an embrace of peace at the close of each day as the darkness surrounds you.

This is really what we celebrate on this Feast of the Ascension of the Lord: the holy mystery that imbues our life with purpose and hope: the worship of the awesome majesty of Christ in heaven, and the continuing intimacy of the Lord on earth.

Father John Kasper, OSFS

