

Confusion

Genesis 45:1-15; Matthew 15:21-28

Rev J Shannon

I don't know about you, but the phrase "who do you say I am?" has always echoed and even haunted me through my life. It will pop into my head when I least expect it. One of the wonderful experiences in chaplaincy is hearing just how diverse people's perceptions and beliefs were.

Let's try a little experiment – who is God to you?

(space for responses)

How many see the divine as a father figure?

How many see the divine as gender neutral?

Do you have an image in mind?

The images that we carry are a relatively recent invention. Before the middle-ages there were no representations of the Lord. Our Biblical references are things like a cloud, a fog and a burning bush. It was believed that no one could look upon the Lord and survive – that is until Jacob. He bragged that he had wrestled with the Lord and survived...and described him as 'a man'.

All the images that we carry in our heads were planted there by the painters and stain glass window makers trying to tell stories to illiterate congregations. They are no 'truer' than the blue-eyed blond Jesus that came from Eastern Europe. We 'know' Jesus was middle Eastern but the images in our heads are not. Tricky. When I was in Mexico, we saw statues and paintings of black Jesus and a very, very dark Mary.

And language is a real test – we just don't have the words in any language to describe our sense of unknowing. The Mystics tried. This is probably the reason why so many people say things like 'I feel closer to God when I am walking in nature'.

Let's hear a few from Shona Chisholm. (see attachment)

The meaning of words change over time. Perhaps not the meaning but the understanding. One of the giant hurdles we are having in trying to teach consent to young people is that their understanding of 'respect' comes from rap music. "Are you dissing me, man?" Respect in that culture is fear. You fear me because I have a gun. You should respect me because I might. In all the street talk and Gaol talk, respect is not holding someone in high esteem or even value as a human – it is fear. Street language which was a complete misunderstanding, or misuse, of the language of an older generation. It has become the lingua franca, the norm, for anyone under

25. Language changes – it is organic otherwise we would all ‘speakith ‘the language of Shakespeare.

So trying to teach a new generation to ‘respect’ women is almost like a red rag to a bull for a disaffected male population. It has the opposite effect. Sadly, this is demonstrated in the increase in domestic violence and trolling threats to any woman to appears in the media. Trying to teach respect is confusing – in their minds it is almost a contradiction in terms.

What about ‘believe’? Believe in me is a constant Biblical theme¹. And at times can seem like a taunt – like it is accusing us of all our doubts and uncertainties. The meaning of the word ‘believe’ has changed over the centuries. Today we use it to refer to **things** like: statements; creeds and constitutions but before the 7th century, it only referred to a **person**.

In premodern English it meant: to hold dear; to prize; to give one’s loyalty to; to give one’s self to; to commit oneself. It meant. . . faithfulness, allegiance, loyalty, commitment, and trust.² Under this definition, it is more appropriate to believe in a football team than a creed.

It puts a whole new emphasis on what we learned in “safe church’ training. We are told that our first response to any complaint about abuse is to *believe* them. As a church, we should understand the deeper meaning.

Most simply, “to believe” meant “to love.” Indeed, the English words “believe” and “belove” are related. What we believe is what we belove. Faith is about believing God. . . To believe in God is to belove God. It is as simple as that.

Now I ask you to sit for a moment – and remember: Who was the God you believed in as a child? Create a picture in your mind. Hold that. (pause)

Who is the God you believe in today? Has the impression changed?

The Bible tells us to fear God AND to love God. Isn’t that a little confusing? Do we do something right because we are afraid of the consequences like the Egyptian midwives or because it is the right thing to do? Does it have something to do with empathy, values and morality? Or is it simply because we love our God? Could it be

¹ Staring in Numbers14:11 - The Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? And carrying through all the Gospels to John 9:36 - Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell **me** so that I may **believe in** him.”

² The Heart of Christianity by Marcus Borg

God on our hearts that tells us what is right and what is wrong? It is the sign of 'faithfulness, allegiance, loyalty, commitment and trust.'³

By now, you've figured out that our relationship with God is very individual. There is the God within and the impression of God out-there, all of it influenced by what we have seen and what we have been told.

...AND there is God, unknowable and in a thousand names; Jesus, the Divine, mother and father of us all; the spirit; Holy Spirit; the soul of the land – Soul of the universe; hovering spirit; breath of life; Lord; Father; The Messiah; Redeemer; Christ; Lord almighty; creator; King; Yahweh and Allah. Websters Dictionary lists 38 names for God – and each one of them represents a person's perspective: a humble human's grapple with what the mysterious, the unknowable might be. Each name speaks to an individual. It is not confusion or delusion – it is inclusion. There is a God space in our brains: "the God spot".⁴

First nations people all over the world know God by their many names. Through their spirituality, we have been given a glimpse of how they see God in their land and in themselves. When we listen to the music of their words, we too, get a glimpse of the Divine.

Today's passage is entitled, "Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah" – not because the ancient texts told us that but because a medieval scribe somewhere between the 13-16th century decided to interpret every chapter in the Bible with his personal declaration of what that chapter meant. Sometimes he was right...sometimes not.

Not to negate Peter's epiphany but this chapter is more important than Peter's declaration. It represents a deeper question – a more rigorous test. Who is God... to you? 'Who do you say I am?'

And as Peter answered the question with true belief, that is 'love, faithfulness, allegiance, loyalty, commitment and trust.'⁵

Then THAT would be the foundation of the church – the rock on which it would be built. There should be no confusion – just wonder.

³ IBID

⁴ Is the "God Spot" Rooted Far Below Our Brain's Thinking Cap?: Spirituality and religiosity may be tied to circuits rooted in the brainstem. published July 3, 2021 Psychology today

⁵ The Heart of Christianity, Borg

Just as Paul says, each is a vital part of the body of Christ, each arm and leg, each ear and mouth – so is the collective vision, the unsayable, indescribable, unknowable becomes a whole in the unity of Christ.

As a window into that diverse creation, my prayer today comes from **Uncle Vince Ross**:

May the God of creation warm your heart like the campfires of old
Bring wisdom and peace as shown to the first peoples of this land
Shake off the dust from the desert plains by the refreshing rains
Followed by the glow and warmth of the sun
Let the light of God show us the right path and stand tall like the big
River gums drawing life from the ever-flowing waters. Amen

<p>I am Who I am What I am How I am I am loved for Who I am What I am How I am</p> <p>And that love Forever Calls me deeper Into that love.</p>	<p>There is nothing external about God that isn't also internal.</p>
<p>God is in each moment Each fibre-cell part of me Inviting me into each part of me The known and yet unknown by me.</p> <p>God is already there in my unknown places Waiting for me to arrive To welcome me Heal me Nurture and nourish me.</p>	<p>As silence is ever present Not matter what the noise As God is ever present No matter what the distractions</p> <p>God, grow this awareness in me Each moment.</p>

Written by Shona Chisholm 2015 shonacards@gmail.com