

Covenant Program #6: God

Light Candle “O spinner, Weaver, of our lives, your loom is love. May we who are gathered here be empowered by that love to weave new patterns of Truth and Justice into a web of life that is strong, beautiful, and everlasting.” – Barbara Wells

Check In: “How goes it with your spirit?”

Opening Readings:

Karen Armstrong, from *A History of God*: “A personal God can become a grave liability. He can be a mere idol carved in our own image, a projection of our limited needs, fears and desires. We can assume that he loves what we love and hates what we hate, endorsing our prejudices instead of compelling us to transcend them. Instead of inspiring the compassion that should characterize all advanced religion, “he” can encourage us to judge, condemn and marginalize.”

Karen Armstrong, from *A History of God*: “Today many people in the West would be dismayed if a leading theologian suggested that God was in some profound sense a product of the imagination. Yet it should be obvious that the imagination is the chief religious faculty. Human beings are the only animals who have the capacity to envisage something that is not present or something that does not yet exist but which is merely possible. The imagination has thus been the cause of our major achievements in science and technology as well as in art and religion. The idea of God, however it is defined, is perhaps the prime example of an absent reality which, despite its inbuilt problems, has continued to inspire men and women for thousands of years. As in art, the most effective religious symbols are those

informed by an intelligent knowledge and understanding of the human condition.”

Reflection Questions:

Obviously, God is not “God’s” name. God is just a word we use to point to what some call the source of life, the ultimate, the Creator, the sustainer, or the divine, among many other names. The purpose of these questions is to reflect deeply on what you do (or don’t) believe about ‘God,’ and to be able to articulate that.

1. The birth, life, death, and rebirth of God: What are your earliest understandings of God through your younger years, your middle years...to right now? How have your ideas of God changed? Have certain ‘Gods’ died and been reborn? Is there anything that hasn’t changed?
2. If you don’t believe in ‘God,’ talk about the ‘God’ you don’t believe in. What is of ultimate importance in your life?
3. Can God simply be conceptualized (thought of, thought about, imagined, etc.)? Or does God have to be experienced (as an event or particular experience)?
4. How do you understand Jesus? As a human being? As a Child/Son of God (ie, part of the trinity)? Are we all children of God? And if so, what expectations does that place on us? (i.e., as people of ‘God,’ are there particular things we are called to do?)
5. Are there particular people you’ve met who reflect “God” or truly seem to be a ‘holy’ people? What makes someone ‘holy’?

Check Out: Share a word or sentence about what you are leaving with...or share a word of appreciation with someone who said something that you found meaningful.

Business

Closing Reading:

**“I Have Learned So Much,” from *The Gift*,
poems by Hafiz.**

I
Have
Learned
So much from God
That I can no longer
Call
Myself

A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim,
A Buddhist, a Jew.

The Truth has shared so much of Itself
With me

That I can no longer call myself
A man, a woman, an angel,
Or even pure
Soul

Love has
Befriended Hafiz so completely
It has turned to ash
And freed
Me

Of every concept and image
My mind has ever known

Extinguish Chalice

**Some helpful definitions surrounding the
word “God:”**

Atheist: Someone who does not believe in a personal deity or any deity at all.

Theist: Someone who believes in a personal deity who is involved in the world to some degree.

Deist: Someone who believes that God created the world and natural laws, but has since stepped out of the picture.

Pantheist: Someone who believes that God is nature.

Panentheist: Some who believes that God is in nature and also transcends nature.

Agnostic: One who believes it cannot be determined whether or not God exists.

Religious Naturalism: A set of beliefs and attitudes that affirm that there are religious aspects of this world which can be understood within a naturalistic framework (i.e., that only nature is “real,” and that all causes are natural causes and that every event is caused by a natural event.

Humanism: George Marshall, Unitarian theologian, describes humanism this way: “The humanist is one who defines religion and the religious quest in terms of human duties, responsibilities and aspirations instead of God’s expectations and demands upon them.”

Process Theist: God is understood more as an event, a process, a verb, a happening.

Mysticism: “The mystical experience of God has certain characteristics that are common to all faiths. It is a subjective experience that involves an interior journey, not a perception of an objective fact outside the self; it is undertaken through the image-making part of the mind--often called the imagination--rather than through the more cerebral, logical faculty.” (Karen Armstrong, *A History of God.*)