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# First God forgives

Roger Karban | Jul. 27, 2013 Spiritual Reflections

Our Genesis author continues along the same road we traveled last week: pointing out personality traits in our faith ancestor that readers are expected to imitate. Two stand out today.

During a time in which set prices weren?t tagged on items for sale, one tried to obtain the object for as low a cost as possible. From an early age, one learned and practiced the art of negotiating, and Abraham demonstrates this skill.

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Genesis 18:20-32
Psalm 138
Colossians 2:12-14
Luke 11:1-13

Though no scholar takes this story literally, the product over which Abraham and Yahweh were negotiating is at the heart of the second characteristic our sacred author is promoting. The first Jewish patriarch is trying his best to save innocent people from destruction, a task that eventually involved all Yahweh?s followers.

Life is the most important of God?s gifts. All biblical theology focuses on preserving and improving life. Since the concept of an afterlife as we know it only appears in Scripture about a hundred years before Jesus? birth, staying alive here and now, and experiencing the most fulfilling life possible was the goal of all God?s earliest followers.

Even in the face of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah?s ?outrageous? lack of hospitality, Yahweh is still willing to spare both towns if only 10 ?just? people can be found. Remembering that ?justice? in Scripture always refers to the relations Yahweh expects us to have with one another, our sacred author is telling us that only a few just people can change an unjust environment. Not only were the ancient Israelites encouraged to intercede with God for the lives of all people, but their own generous lifestyle was to be an example even to non-Jews of how to achieve a fulfilled life.

The unknown author of Colossians isn?t concerned with pleading with God for the salvation of all people; he?s interested in reflecting on God?s generosity to all who dare imitate Jesus? dying and rising. ?Brothers and sisters,? he writes, ?you were buried with him [Jesus] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.?

Jesus not only provides us an example of how to relate to God and others, he also becomes one with anyone willing to give himself or herself over to his lifestyle.

Jesus? first followers were attracted to his faith not so much because it guaranteed their entry into heaven (Mark?s Chapter 10 passage on the rich young man tells us we can get there by just ?keeping the commandments?), but because it opened the door to a new way of approaching and living life right here and now. Our faith morphs us into new people.

One of Stan Musial?s grandsons shared a terrific insight into the baseball great?s personality during his funeral. ?My grandfather,? he said, ?always made nobodies feel like somebodies.? I presume Jesus? first disciples made a similar observation about him. The risen Jesus expects us to do good things, not because bad people run the risk of eternal damnation by doing bad things, but because good people, like ourselves, naturally do good things.

Luke couldn?t agree more.

Beyond the extra verbiage, one significant difference between Matthew?s and Luke?s Lord?s Prayer revolves around God?s forgiveness. Matthew?s Jesus tells us in Chapter 6 to pray, ?Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.? While Luke?s version reads, ?Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us.? The former implies a ?quid pro quo?: You?ll do this if we?ll do that. The latter implies that, because of God?s forgiving generosity toward us, we?re prompted to forgive others. God forgives even if we don?t forgive.

Luke certainly conveys the picture of a generous God in the rest of today?s pericope. God not only listens to us, but is eager to do what it good for us, no matter our dispo-sition. We need only ask and we?ll receive, seek and we?ll find, knock and the door will be opened to us.

What prompts such generosity? There can only be one answer: God must value each of us very highly.

All our sacred authors presume no one can do anything to force God to love him or her. As our Colossians author stressed, God loved us ?even when we were dead in [our] transgressions.?

God obviously sees something in us that many of us don?t even notice in ourselves, much less in others.

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