



The Language of God

Trauma, Poetry, and Metaphor

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Learning the Language of God

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Reading Scripture in the Language of God

Freedom is poetic for it dances to the rhythm of life with an ear for justice, a heart for truth, and an indomitable will. Freedom is the search for meaning, it is at the center of human experience, it is our inwardness where we are alone in a world of billions of people. The search for meaning requires a little playfulness, a touch of skin, an embrace of our creatureliness, so that in humility, we might learn how love changes everything, how without forgiveness the world doesn't work, how redemption is the heartbeat of God that rushes past our control of language. Language is living, always in color, and belongs to spirit, to movement, not concreteness; but meaning touches the soul with conviction and has only one tongue.

In this world of promise and chance, where the undoing of goodness prevails daily, it is the poetic life that ties together the unraveled tether of meaning. Poetry is never reductionist, it is always expansive, embracing the darkness to bring in the light where the static language of legality attempts to bind God. Interpretive science is wonderfully helpful, an essential aspect for understanding, but it is reductionist without the poetic.

We can neither write nor speak without some use of the poetic. Poetry is spirit unleashed upon words, words written to ignite the imagination and lift the soul. Poetry is always a power hiding in the text of scripture waiting to be released by the discerning eye of those who hear God's heart. Only the poet can wrestle us free from our desire to control so that we might travel with the wind, or even be swept up in the wind of life.

We are inheritors of traditions and dogmas, of claims to authority, of interpretive methods, and like children who need structure, we avoid thoughts that challenge our structured world, like children our internal word is *No*. We fear the unknown, the independent thinker, the contrarian, the prophet, the one who walks close to God. Yet, the word of God is like that two-edged sword that cuts, it is like a breach upon reality that changes everything. We long for such persons to appear, but when they do our internal *No* resists, fear of the unknown arises, and we begin to throw our stones. We must learn to embrace the traumatic aspect of our faith.

The spiritual life is always traumatic, it is like birth when we leave our womb of comfort, disrupted by contracting muscles, the water breaks to leave us feeling the collapsed placenta surrounding us, only the cord of life through which we breathe and are nourished holds us in this moment. Then, as we are pushed into the light, our skull gives to the pressure and we enter the world to see for the first time, and the terror of breathing takes hold of us as our lifeline is cut and we can never return to where we began. Water and blood mark our beginning, spirit and life, wrapped in a little bit of skin, the image of God enters the world.

In time we speak our first word. We are creatures of meaning, discerners of a reality that leads to God. We rise quickly to stand upright, to carry this nobility that declares we are godlike creatures who form reality for one another. We wrestle with reality and while we are young, we prefer the imagination; we claim our power to create reality. In part, because the world is too raw, too broken, too unlike our expectations, expectations born of the nobility of being related to God in image and likeness.

Meaning is alive, fluid like a womb holding all humanity. The poetic imagination can reveal the reason a law was written, and the reason is more important than the law. The poetic imagination can reveal the multiplicity of meaning in a story and touch the lives of every listener. The poetic imagination can wrestle with a letter (epistle) and weigh it alongside meaning where ambiguity replaces certainty. Without imagination interpreting a letter is like looking through a keyhole into a very large room, but you see only a corridor.

Life's blessed moments are not the ceremonies that mark the way, rather they are the wind that carries us with a life forming memory.

Life is not a Ceremony

Remembering the poor is more of a sacred act than a sacramental ceremony performed for the seated. It is to fulfill the promises of God for lifting up the poor and oppressed.

It is difficult for me to sit for a crumb and a sip and label a ceremonial event as sacred. This is because only human beings are sacred to God. To remove the eucharist from its setting removes it from its grander meaning, reduces it to a function rather than a call to pursue meaning together and share the fullness of the earth together. The removal of the ceremony from an actual meal shared by rich and poor allows for a Christianity void of the trauma that accompanies spiritual growth. To sit the rich with the poor is an unsettling experience for both. If a soul sees another with need and has the resources to meet that need but shuts up their heart then they have not learned the language of God.

Unwilling to risk our security, our little world, we continue to murder the voice of God daily rather than obey the teachings of Jesus, rather than be like Jesus. We have left Lazarus at the gate of our lives and abandoned his children to the whims of the state. Like Simon, we do not share our table with women forced to live in a man's world. We have not called the blind, the lame, the hungry, the poor, the suffering, to a feast where food is served and love is shared, but to a religion where life, where meaning, is replaced with a ceremony under the distraction of the claim that it's a mystery.

The table of the Lord is a metaphor for shared abundance. The body and blood are metaphors for the self-giving love and life resident in God's people.

The table can be literally a table, it can represent the creation and all the wealth that lies in the earth and rises from the ground for us to eat, clothe ourselves, build our homes, and care for one another, metaphorically it can represent the faith of Jesus resident in those who share freely of their life and resources with others. The table is not part of the ceremony, it is the location where the ceremony is introduced. It is a real location where people fellowship around a meal.

The body of Christ is, of course, a metaphor for those who follow the teachings of Jesus and blood is representative of life. Blood is bright red and stains all it touches because blood belongs in the body, our blood is our life. The first rule of first aid for a traumatic injury is to stop the bleeding. We are to let the life of Christ Jesus flow through our veins for we partake of the bread of life when we live in the will and desire of God by hearing God's voice.

Metaphors bear meaning and are grander than regulations. Living out meaning within the setting of a ceremony produces stories, memories, and brings life.

To introduce the communion ceremony at a table where rich and poor eat together accomplishes numerous good. First, is to direct the table talk to discussion on the meaning of Jesus' death. To reduce the meaning of Jesus' death to PSA theory is harmful and lacks the poetic beauty of all the love to be considered (John 3:16). Secondly, if we are not to profane the body and blood of the Lord, then there must be a sharing that meets the practical needs of the body. There shall be no poor among you is the perennial calling of the church. Life is best when caring for others is a personal act born of relationship around the table of the Lord. The table is the Lord's when we live out the same care that Jesus had for characters at a table as diverse as his disciples, Simon the Pharisee, the nameless weeping woman. Jesus' allowed a group of men to lower a paralytic down through his roof while sitting with others in his home!

Scriptures' metaphors are guides for imagination guided by spirit.

Metaphors are not scientifically descriptive. In scripture, metaphors are signs of meaning, meaning to be searched out and lived. Faith in God who loves us and provides us with the freedom to choose gives us an inviolable freedom, gives meaning to life. Metaphors must be revisited because we tend to solidify their meaning. My revisiting of the new birth metaphor links trauma and the religious life in a way that is faithful to the metaphor and is consistent with the intensity of other metaphors like, *darkness and light*, and *the salt of the earth*.

Literal readings miss metaphors and produce rules.

Isn't how we enact the eucharist as important as the meaning? If we read-only 'do this' and do not consider the dynamics of Paul's intent for the Corinthians, we miss the heart of God. Paul was not writing to us. Should we not consider the grander theology that flows from the Exodus to the last supper? Isn't this what Jesus was doing by introducing the eucharist with the word remember? For Christians, the last supper ceremony replaces the Passover ceremony.

God (without violence) chose to demonstrate that life and death are in God's control by identifying the firstborn as those who would die in any household that did not put blood on their doorposts as a sign of belief. In haste, the slaves fled, for God knew Pharaoh's madness would erupt. This stain on the doorposts was also, in an uncomfortable way, a stain upon God's self-revelation and sits in contrast to the cross where God will not kill but allows humanity to kill God wrapped in a little bit of skin. A stain on the doorposts, yet it reminds us that God alone is sovereign over life. Pharaoh, like all state powers who would claim the right to take life, fell prey to his own madness and lost to the Lord who reigns over chaos.

In Christian theology, we suffer a lack of imagination, a lack of consistent theological coherence with the rest of scripture, and this leaves us living with contradictions, so we simply choose the passage of the day to get through. The elements of the eucharist have already been profaned and the living reality of a shared meal with sweet wine and hot bread is reduced to a cracker crumb or a tasteless disc and some Welch's grape juice. Yet, we continue to profane the body and blood of Christ. The rich have their dinner parties and call it a Christian gathering but fail to invite the weak, the needy, the suffering, who they sit with during a mystery that has lost all practical meaning.

A lived metaphor fulfills the scripture.

The communion ceremony is a metaphor and an act. As an act, it bears the marks of introducing a tradition. As a metaphor, its meaning is to be lived out in acts of sharing both the meaning of Jesus' death and lifting up the poor seated at the table through acts of giving. It is not meant to be overseen by priests or ministers, it is a practice for gathering whether in a church building or a home. It is not a mystery it is a practical way of living out the calling of God for us to love one another.

To remember the works of God is to displace time and bring the qualitative moment of the past into the present.

Remembering is a time displacing power that connects us with the feelings and *spirit* of the past. Consider how reconnecting with an old friend can revive a lived moment. A friend recounting a joyous event can, in a moment, lift your emotions and memory in such a way as to displace time itself simply by telling a story. The distance of time and absence in a friendship is bridged through recounting a memory.

Remembering is to tell the story of one's past, to add to the story the delight of understanding gained over time. Remembering is connecting the present with the past and retaining both while melding the two into a (if you're a healthy-minded person) better story.

The communion ceremony makes remembering a relational affair, for we are united as the body of Christ to share in the life that flows from the Spirit who meets all of us who are wrapped in a little bit of skin to take care of our physical and spiritual needs. It is also a time of thinking theologically together about the meaning of our crucified God. We will never have enough words and so we need the poet.

The language of God is the poetry of life lived in the Spirit, it is a practical language, for love of God and neighbor is always an act and never a mystery. The question, Who is my neighbor? is always a lie.