

**Exodus 12:1-14**  
**Romans 13:8-14**  
**Matthew 18:15-20**

When I was in seminary, I had a liturgy professor who was a Methodist. He, in turn, had been educated at a Roman Catholic school: Notre Dame. There, he had a liturgy professor who was an Anglican. And what that man – that Episcopal priest – said to his liturgy students right before the Eucharist was: "Let's go get God worshipped!"

I like that. Let's go get God worshipped. It is an impulse that is at the very core of who we are as Episcopalians. Our liturgy; our music; our preaching – almost everything we do – points to how much we love God; how much we want to worship God. We want to thank and give praise to God.

So.....

We gather in worship, once a week, and focus our attention on the good news of our faith: that we are loved without condition; that we are forgiven of our mistakes and shortcomings and embarrassments; and that our mutual choice of God as having importance in our lives is the glue that holds us to one another.

This is pretty remarkable when you think about the differences that could otherwise divide us. We don't all belong to the same political party. We are not all of the same ethnic origin. We're not all in the same tax bracket. We don't root for the same football teams.

And we don't all always get along. Why? Because we're human. So the Holy Spirit whom we believe has inspired sacred text gives us some relational pointers in today's gospel reading. If someone has angered you, go to that one and try to make peace. It's pretty simple. And it's lovely. But we have to be told this because once offended, all too often we remove ourselves and become isolated in our anger.

But the glue that holds us together is that – once a week – we go get God worshipped: with one another. With help from sacred text and the Holy Spirit, we can rise above our differences for a greater purpose.

The question I want to pose today has to do with this God whom we gather to worship. Specifically: Who is God to you?

For the members of my family – long since passed away – God was "the man upstairs." I grew up hearing that phrase. For my family at least, the man upstairs was benevolent and had our best interests at heart.....but was not someone with whom my relatives were on a first name basis. God was remote. And any discourse that one might have with the Almighty, well, that was very private. Polite Christians kept such things to themselves.

Then there is the God whom Jesus called "Father." Jesus invited us to pray to our Father in heaven, whose very name was hallowed and yet whose name was "Abba." To this day young Arab boys and girls in the Middle East call their beloved dads or granddads by this term of

endearment: Abba. Personal; intimate; loving – this is what Jesus tried to communicate to us about God.

Then some number of centuries after Jesus came what we call the Enlightenment, a period in human history in which unfettered excitement reigned regarding the mind. Reason, logic, rationality were celebrated to the extent that anything not fitting into the categories of reason and logic were disavowed. The Enlightenment dealt a death blow to mystery and to some extent, to God.

Anything was suspect that could not be explained rationally. God could not be explained rationally. God was suspect. This suspicion and hesitation has characterized faith for at least three hundred years, reaching its climax in the twentieth century. Nowadays it just isn't very cool to believe in God. This is especially true among young people who in record numbers are claiming to be atheists.

However: a number of very bold thinkers – philosophers, theologians, mystics – are looking at God from a new perspective. What they are saying is that God is not the man upstairs because to say such a thing is to suggest that God is just another being like one of us. Much bigger; perfect; holy – yes – but still, a being.

The radical thing they are saying is that God is not a being, but is Being itself. God is existence itself. When Jesus taught us to call God “Father,” he was trying to communicate that existence is Love. The universe is for us; not against us. Everything in the universe conspires for goodness in the form of becoming; growth; self-expression; and consciousness. These are some of the attributes of Love with a capital “L:” coming into existence; growing and developing; achieving greater levels or expanse of consciousness.

I know this can begin to sound abstract. Here's a way to consider this:

The particles that make up an atom are protons, neutrons and electrons. Remember that from high school science? Protons and neutrons form the nucleus of the atom and the electron circles about the happy couple at a distance. Now, imagine these particles are the size of humans. You will have a proton person and a neutron person standing together in the center of a football field. The electron person would be walking around the outside of the stadium. There is that much space inside an atom. There is that much space inside every atom. And that space is Existence. That space is God. Furthermore, all that space is Love.

That means, of course, that God is in everything. This was the insight of our Native American brothers and sisters who saw Great Spirit in the animals; in the water; in the wind. So did Francis of Assisi eight hundred years ago. God is in everything. There is nothing that God is not in. If that were the case, that thing would not have existence. God is Existence and that existence is Love.

A technical way of saying that God is in everything is to say that there is a spark of the infinite in everything that is finite. There is a spark of unlimited eternity in everything that is limited and mortal. The great twentieth century theologian Paul Tillich wrote about this a great

deal. It's hard for us to get our mind around this – that there is the divine in everything. It almost sounds scandalous. But it's also hopeful. We are not alone; we can never truly be separated from God.

Once we understand that God is Love, it changes how we think about God. So here comes the bombshell: God does not love. Loving is not an action of God that can be turned on or off. Loving is not an attribution or characteristic of God. Rather: God is Love. Loving is not what God does it is what God is. It's kind of like saying that air is fluid; water is wet; fire is hot; God is love. And we are never, ever without God's love.

The trick is – and I know it's hard – is to figure out how to retain a personal relationship with this bigger, more abstract conception of God. That's where Jesus comes in. He's the one who tells us that while Love equals Existence, Love is utterly personal and intimate.

If your God is the man upstairs whose affection you can win or lose; whom you can please or displease; I suggest you reconsider. Some outdated ideas are finally being retired that have kept so many people away from God. Actually, it is God who suffers when we are estranged from Love. And it is God who rejoices when we agree to receive Love.

This is why Episcopalians get excited when someone says, "Let's go get God worshipped" because God is so wonderful!

Amen.