

Session #4: God's Gift Economy: Learning to be a Community of Faith/Trust

Review

Focal Question What can we say about the distinct shape of God's in-breaking reign to which we are called to be embodied witnesses/signposts?

God's Economy The dynamic at the heart of God's reign: an economy of the open hand that entails first *receiving* God's good and transformative gifts and then *keeping them in circulation*.

Mt 10:7-8: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

Preeminence of Love "God is love. . . .We love because God first loved us"(1 Jn 4:7-21); ". . . the greatest of these is love"(1 Cor. 13); "But the fruit of the Spirit is love . . ." (Gal 5:22-23); Jn 3:16; Mark 12:28-34

Agape: The relentless pursuit of the well-being of another through the giving of oneself.

The 2nd Theological Virtue ("Excellence"): Faith ("These three remain: faith, hope, and love..." 1 Cor 13:13)
Our response to God's love; what response is God trying to elicit?

Challenges of translation:

Faith (noun)
Believe (verb)

Rom. 4:3-5 NIV:

"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. 5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Different possible ways of understandings this response and posture of "faith":

1. Faith as believing that _____ is so; that certain things are true.
Challenge: mainly happens in our heads; nothing *necessarily* follows.
Identity: what makes you a Christian is that you believe things other people don't.
Opposite of faith/greatest threat to faith: doubt
2. Faith as trust
Abraham as the great "hero" of faith (see Heb 11)
Identity: Believing can be private; trusting is social and public
Opposite of trust/greatest threat to trust: excessive fear, worry and anxiety
3. Faith as fidelity/faithfulness
Relational; fidelity to a relationship
Opposite/greatest threat: infidelity as idolatry—fidelity to something else
4. Faith as a way of seeing, a way of seeing the whole
 - a. Reality as hostile and threatening; leads to a posture of self-protection
 - b. Reality as indifferent to human existence; leads to seeking security and meaning
 - c. Reality as supportive, gracious, and nourishing; leads to posture of trust and gratitude

Resource: See sermon by Marcus Borg, "Faith: A Journey of Trust."

http://www.explorefaith.org/faces/my_faith/borg/faith_by_marcus_borg.php

Reflection Questions God's Gift Economy: Learning to be a Community of Faith/Trust

If "faith" is less about believing certain things about God in our heads and more about trusting in God with our whole lives, what kinds of differences might this make in our daily lives?

1) How we understand the identity and purpose of communities of faith:

What if communities of faith are less gatherings of those who believe all the right things about God and are more gatherings of those who seek together to trust God and the ways of God more faithfully?

2) How we understand bearing witness to our faith:

What if bearing witness to our faith isn't primarily about convincing people to believe the right things about God, but offering them a glimpse of God's desires for all of creation, a glimpse of what it might look like to be on a journey of liberation from the powers of darkness toward a life that is more fully and truly human?

3) How we understand the role of doubt, fear, worry, and anxiety in our lives:

What if doubt is not the primary enemy of faith understood as trust? What if fear, worry, and anxiety are? (And to be clear, here we are not talking about clinical anxiety disorders, but the more everyday kinds of fear, worry and anxiety we all have.)

If trust is the primary response God asks of us in response to God's relentless self-giving love and desire for our well-being and flourishing, we cannot avoid asking potentially uncomfortable questions about where we routinely place our trust in our everyday lives:

1. In your daily life, in what or whom do you most often place your trust? In your daily life as St. John of the Wilderness, in what or whom do you all most place your trust?

2. Where in your daily life do you already find yourself trusting in God? Where in the daily life of your parish do you sense you are trusting God? Where do you sense there is room for growth in trust in your own life and the life of your parish?

3. What do you think a daily life of deeper trust in God might look like? Who do you know who is living such a life? What about their life inspires you to trust more or differently?

4. If you were in the coming weeks to take a small step of trust in God, what might it look like for you? What might it look like for your parish?