

## Beyond Sight

“God is very, very large!” This was the response of a young missionary when asked how she was doing early in her ministry. Let me share her story:

Edwina Gately, British and Roman Catholic, founder of Genesis House here in Chicago, a ministry to our city’s prostitutes. When she was a very young woman, very devout, she volunteered to be a missionary and was sent to Africa. She knew all about God. She was very pious. She had been taught very well in church. And when she got to Africa she found that the people there knew all about God too, only they knew some profoundly different things. She saw and felt God in places she’d never known to look. It didn’t negate what she had already known about God, it just added and added and added to it. God transcendent, twinkling from stars; God immanent in the beauty of the river and the smile of a neighbor; God indwelling with every drawn breath, every pang of hunger, and heartbeat of sisterly love.

Those who had sent her to the area checked in on her, asked how she was doing. She said her days were confused, groping. It was almost too much. “God is very, very large!” she told them. And they told her not to be silly; they told her to hold onto the fine teaching she’d had throughout her youth. When her time of service was over she returned to Britain, and because she’d always been a model young Christian (to the point of being a missionary, even!) she was sent around to speak to others. And she had one message to share: God is very, very large!

And again the leaders of the church told her this was absurd and incorrect. God is great, of course, but not large. But although they curbed her speaking engagements, Edwina has spent her life sharing the message that she learned in Africa—with prostitutes, with anyone who will listen: God is very, very large! And she is right. Yes, God is powerful, loving, and just beyond our comprehension, but what it boils down to is that God is just very large, enormous, filling the universe, infusing every atom; God is the wind in the leaves, the leaves themselves, the tree that grew them, the soil that sustains them, the sky they pierce, everything! God is just very, very large.

God is so large, so vast, so beyond, so other, that without some sense of this “largeness” we humans tend to view God as simply as really super human. Making God “too small” as J.B. Phillips, entitled his now classic book written in the 1960’s. Jesus, both in his prayer, which although we most often recite, serves as a powerful pattern for prayer: acknowledging and praising God, seeking God’s will and way, sharing our worries (wondering about our daily bread), seeking and granting forgiveness, and praying to be stronger faithfully in the future.

This teaching on prayer and the continuing parable stressing how little we comprehend of God follows the sending out or the 72, the definition of neighbor found in the story of the Good Samaritan, and of his visit to Mary and Martha’s. It tells me that the need to pause and ponder God’s greatness is vital no matter where one is along their faith journey and is something that needs oft repeating. As important as our attention to the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, reflection, Christian

conversation and engaging intellectually, so is the importance of breaking into praise, as Paul often does, of experiencing and proclaiming that God is very, very large.

As we celebrate and worship this large God I invite you to embrace 2 aspects of this largeness. First let's consider what of God we can experience, the ways that God is revealed and reveals God's self. In the beauty of nature, the wonder of human interaction, the newness of forgiveness, the certainty of God's strength in our times of weakness ... consider those ways you have touched on the vastness of God, and the frequency with which we overlook it. God's largeness can be seen in the rain as well as sunshine, in the dark as well as brightness, in the ordinary times as well as those extraordinarily good or bad.

Paul breaks into wonder of this greatness of God revealed in Christ – inviting celebration of that which is beyond, reminding that we do not see all of God, not even I the earthly life of Jesus, that we do not get all there is to God of God, yet we can "know" it.

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> aspect of God's vastness I invite you to embrace with me today, that which is totally beyond – sight, beyond understanding – beyond us.

Like we have seen in today's New Testament readings(s) Isaiah also called believers to, "Behold your God" and proclaimed the immensity and immeasurable of God . He invited us to:

*"Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. The power is seen here reflected in the stars. The vast heavens that surround our earth is inhabited with planets and suns, comets and moons."*

Approximately 6,000 heavenly bodies are visible to us at night as stars, but there are more than just 6,000 stars above us. There are we are told, more than 100 billion stars in our galaxy, The Milky Way" alone. 100 billion stars in our galaxy alone and scientists tell us now that there are millions of other galaxies.

Philip Yancy in an article in "Christianity Today" in 1997 wrote "Just in the last few years astronomers have admitted underestimating the number of galaxies by 50 billion or so." As Steven Hawkins describes it, earth is a medium size planet orbiting around an average star in the outer suburbs of an ordinary spiral galaxy, which is itself only one of about a million, million galaxies in the observable universe.

Do you know what Isaiah says about all of this? Isaiah says that God created those stars and scattered them around like a man shaking water from his fingertips after a shower. Isaiah reminds us that God brought out all of those billions and billions of bodies, designed each one, put it in its place, arrange the orbits, established galaxies and set it all in motion and all of this the prophet says he does through the greatness of his power. Isaiah said, "Behold your God".

Jesus asks us to consider how good the gifts of God must be in relation to the gifts of a caring human father. Paul calls Jesus the Christ “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Have you considered the vast goodness of God’s gifts, seen and unseen today? Are you embracing all that is visible of God and seeing through time the vast invisible all things? How do you behold God today? Do you limit God to what you understand of God? Have you placed restrictions and boundaries on God? Have you just sectioned off parts of what your life you don't want God to enter in? Has your God become “too small” as you limit your expectations and view to what you can comprehend? Might you be changed, transformed, through embracing the vastness, the “holy otherness” the beyond sight aspect of God? Shall we rest move comfortably and live more faithfully with a God who is big enough for all creation and eternity?