

The Rev. Betsy S. Ivey, Curate
St. Andrew's Proper 5
June 7, 2015

“*Ha satan* or Forgiveness”?

From *Mother Wisdom Speaks* by Christine Lord Webber

Some of you I will hollow out,
I will make you a cave.
I will carve you so deep the stars will shine in your darkness.
You will be a bowl.
You will be the cup in the rock collecting rain.
I will do this because the world needs the hollowness of you.
I will do this for the space you will be.
I will do this because you must be large.
A passage.
People will find their way through you.
A bowl.
People will eat from you
and their hunger will not weaken them to death.
A cup to catch the sacred rain.
Light will flow into your hollowing.
You will be filled with light.
Your bones will shine.
The round open center of you will be radiant.
I will call you the Brilliant One.
I will call you Daughter Who is Wide.
I will call you transformed.

Wow. What a Gospel reading to end my preaching as your Curate. We've got Pharisees

accusing Jesus of being the devil getting Jesus all upset. He took their accusation as busting on the Holy Spirit, and threw down the gauntlet. I love the interpretation of Jesus in the Children's version of the Gospel: 'don't mess with the Holy Spirit ...! We've got hometown friends, his homies, concerned that Jesus may be in over his head with what he's been saying and doing. They go and tell on him, get his mom and siblings to pull him away from the crushing crowd that followed him home. They're not comfortable with who Jesus has become. And, we've got the Fam trying to pry him loose from all of this, I think, to make sure he's okay. And Jesus says something that many think rejects his mom and siblings, but I don't think that interpretation of his response is quite correct. I think he was making a bigger point which I will get to. And, in all of this Jesus lays this heavy question on us that obviously relates to what the Pharisees accused of him, but what on earth is Jesus talking about? 'How can Satan cast out Satan?' Huh? It sounds like he is referring to himself as Satan, but he can't be saying that. So what does he mean by this?

First, allow me to de-mythologize, remove the spookiness, of Satan. The biblical Satan is not a red devil figure with long spiked tail and a pitch fork, stoking the flames of hell, waiting for us bad folks to burn up in eternal damnation. Satan is that energy among us that has turned against God, and is the Accuser.¹ Think about the Satan in Job who accused Job to God of being a 'Mr. Goody Two Shoes'. Think of the devil who accused God of false advertising by tempting Jesus in the wilderness after his baptism. These biblical portrayals are a more accurate portrayal of what Satan really is. In today's world we can find Satan in all the bad '-isms' and the economic greed that oppress people around the world. Satan seems to have the strength of God. Some even perceive Satan as God-like because the energy of the evil Satan transmits emulates the power of God.

¹*Girardian Reflections on the Lectionary*. http://girardianlectionary.net/year_b/proper_5b.htm. World-wide web. 6 June 2015. 1101.

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But, Satan is not in the same league as God, and will not ever overcome God. But, we humans are complicit with Satan in that we feed the energy, many times unbeknownst to us, with the way we decide to settle our differences, or in the current business lingo, bring about conflict resolution. Satan relies on conflict and chaos to exist and we feed the energy with a steady stream of it. We unwitting ones, have been following the chaos scenario since the 'foundations of the world'. And in Mark's Gospel, Jesus said 'cease and desist' feeding the evil energy. I have a better way of being human through forgiveness.

I was disingenuous with my temerity about this Gospel reading because it really is right up my alley, another one of those sayings I have no idea what it mean, but always seems apropos for when something is on the mark. This is a seminal Gospel passage for sociologist and devout Christian Rene Girard whose interpretation of the Gospels and the meaning of Jesus' death greatly intrigue me. Girard proposed a theory of our complicity with chaos, called the Mimetic Theory. And, in a nutshell, the Mimetic Theory is based on perceiving life through each other's eyes ... eventually coveting something that someone else has ... resolving the conflict that results from the coveting. For example, I'm unhappy, you're a happy person and I covet your happiness. Because I can't have your happiness I begin to accuse you of all kinds of things that are depriving me of being as happy as you. We are now rivals in conflict. Girard says that humans have chosen to resolve this conflict not by destroying each other, but by finding a third party to place the blame on – a scapegoat. So we kill the scapegoat and think we have resolved our conflict. It's a false resolution because we really haven't resolved our conflict. We are still divided, still vulnerable to the next conflict, and as Jesus says in the Gospel reading, “a house divided against itself cannot stand”. Look at the world we live in. We are in a state of conflict with scapegoats every where. We blame the poor, but the conflict is between us and economic greed. We don't want to confront the greed

because it is, also, the source of our economic comfort, so 'it must be poor folks fault that they're poor'. Whenever we've gone to war for something we wanted whether for oil, democracy or freedom, we accused someone else of preventing us from having these things, and they had to die in order for us to have them. Our causes may have seemed noble, but God through Jesus Christ demands that we define ourselves as members of God's household of forgivers, not as accusers. The bigger picture Jesus has shown us to which I referred earlier is to define our family based on one that does not feed into Satan's perpetuation of chaos and conflict, but to form our family based on forgiveness empowered by the Holy Spirit. As one preacher said in his sermon, 'water is thicker than blood'. (William Willems) The water of our baptism that is blessed by the Holy Spirit is the flow of our ability to forgive. Jesus says we must redefine our relationships with each other based on forgiveness of the Holy Spirit rather than on accusation.

Forgiveness is so hard! Forgiveness is one of the hardest things for humans to do. I think that's why we default to scapegoating and accusing because it's so much easier than to do the work of forgiveness. One Amish father who lost a child in the Nickel Mines massacre in 2006 said, "We believe in letting our light shine, but not shining it in the eyes of other people."² This is what I think Jesus meant when he said that we should not be a 'house divided against itself' by accusing each other - 'shining a light in each other's eyes' – accusing each other of being at fault for what's gone wrong. Forgiveness is hard work, borrowing a phrase from Mother Barbara, because it begins in us. We have to go inside and find the God who dwells within to begin *the process of forgiveness*. Our human weakness does not always want us to find God in some of our most dire circumstances. We want to, at least, harrumph; and, at worst blame and accuse. But, we must seek the light that is within us to begin a conversation with those

²Kraybill, Donald B. Steven M. Nolt. David L. Weaver-Zercher. *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcends Tragedy*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass. 2007. 1

with whom we are in conflict, regardless of whether the conflict began with us or them. We start the process by forgiving ourselves of our feelings, and then giving others the space to do the same. Fellow Girardian James Alison said it better than I: ['we need to look at ourselves'] as someone who is primarily forgiven, and for that reason capable of being a forgiving victim for another ... [' Through this huge emotional and spiritual task] we “will understand the salvation which we are receiving from Christ. What this process of forgiveness looks like, Allison says, is “re-imagining how that process of forgiveness reached us first, re-imagining as something done 'for us' and coming to meet us, and as it meets us, enabling us to be turned into imitators of it, so that we may be the same to others just like ourselves”.³ If someone speaks ill of you and you don't know what to do about it, find out what it is in you that has been hurt and speak on it in love to the one who spoke ill of you. Withhold accusing them because that does not resolve your hurt, does it? And you now know that you hold nothing against them and have found a way to a deeper relationship with God through a better understanding of yourself. To be a forgiven forgiver.

This is so crucial because not only is forgiveness the way we take Satan down, but most importantly it is where loving begins. "Forgiveness is ... the way we stop our human community from unraveling" writes Desmond Tutu in *The Book of Forgiveness*.⁴ To stop the conflict of nation against nation. This is why Jesus took it so personally when the Pharisees accused him of having a 'unclean Spirit'. The Spirit of God is not unclean because it is the power that enables us to keep God's world together. Yes, forgiveness begins with us, but it's not all about us as individuals, but about us as a world community. Forgiveness brings heaven to God's earth, so that we are able to find God

³Alison, James. *On Being Liked*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company. 2003. 37-38.

⁴*The Forgiveness Challenge. The Book of Forgiveness*. <https://www.forgivenesschallenge.com/book>. World-wide web. June 6, 2015. 0011

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within ourselves and among us as we begin loving one another. When we begin to forgive ourselves of the complacency of privilege is when we begin to stop blaming those whose lives offer the mirror of despair; and, begin the conversation of how to love with those who perpetuate despair. Forgiveness is hard work. I can't imagine forgiving those who enslaved my ancestors for economic gain, but I must. I must find the language of love that is born of my baptismal vows that requires me to seek Jesus in everyone. If my heart cannot feel the love, then I must graft Jesus' love to my heart so I will know the forgiveness of the risen Christ for being in conflict with those who would persecute me. '

This is the alternate scenario of family values, if you will, that Jesus has offered us. It is a self-giving scenario, like the one he played out for us through his Passion, the Cross and Resurrection. Girard says Jesus exposed the chaos and conflict of Satan when he went to the Cross because Jesus revealed the faulty conflict resolution of scapegoating with his death. And, through his resurrection, he overcame it all. He took Satan down, and raised up for us a transformative way of being a part of God's family – through forgiveness. The Spirit will forgive whatever we say or do, Jesus proffered, and so should we of each other. Each time we go to Jesus' table, may we be in the process of imitating him as vessels that hold and give his transforming forgiveness, forgiveness that is the source of our salvation and of the salvation of this world. Amen.