

2-9-2025 What's your metaphor?

As a very young boy I did not like coming to Spokane. It meant my mom had a list a mile long, a dentist appointment and shopping with my two older sisters. Back then malls did not exist. You went downtown and hit the Crescent, Bon Marche, J. C. Penny's, etc. Imagine an 11-year-old boy stuck on the women's wear floor of a department store. I was too afraid to venture off by myself. Did you know there were no chairs in those places? Well, there was usually just one hidden away and I knew where they all were. As I got older and braver I would journey to the top floor of the Crescent with my life line the plan to meet my family at the Crescent clock in 30 minutes. The top floor was the sporting goods department where I could get away from dresses and skirts and mingle with golf clubs, baseball bats, fishing poles, and bows and arrows.

Prom time was the worst. We would go from store to store and guess what? My sisters would go back to the first dress they looked at and pick that one. Incomprehensible. Some times my sisters would do something that I don't think is done anymore. They would look through these books that had drawings of dresses and blouses, then go to a box and pick out a pattern, buy material, take it home and sew it. I had to sit there and endure, but I must say, what a talent. Can girls do that now?

Circumstances have changed. Sans sisters and dentist I enjoy coming to Spokane. It is good to be with you.

Let us pray. Lord God almighty father, king of power and glory. Really? Really? Father, lord, king? We use those words when we pray to God all the time but do they fit? We are talking about God so shouldn't we get it right? I mean when you think of God what does she look like? Got yah. Doesn't sound right. Grates on your ears. Should it?

Metaphor: *a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract.* When it comes to God, metaphors are the best we can do and they will always fall short. The renowned theologian Karl Rahner said we should stop using the word "God" for 50 years because we don't know what we are talking about. From Al google: *Rahner preferred to avoid using the word God and instead referred to the divine as Absolute Mystery believing that any attempt to define God with human language would fall short of capturing the true, unknowable nature of the divine being; essentially, he viewed God as a mystery that can only be approached through experience and not fully comprehended with words.*

My friend Zack Parker is the tech fellow at school. He has saved my bacon many times. I would say I am not an angry person but, on many occasions, I have come close to throwing computers out the window. He is not what you would call religious but one time I asked him what he thought about God. He said that if God exists then God is probably most like some kind of energy wave. You may laugh but personally I like that metaphor a whole lot more than King. A physicist into string theory might say that God is the quintessential, mother of all strings, the primal string. I like that a whole lot better than lord. God is spirit. A wave of energy seems more like spirit than a king.

Keep in mind that I have been teaching for over thirty years and my mind is toast. Feel free to vehemently disagree with what follows.

Why am I not a fan of those metaphors? Lord and king are masculine and imperial which imply rule, might, authority, control, domination, power and glory. At the start I even used those descriptors, "Lord God **almighty** father, king of **power** and **glory.**"

One reason for the incarnation was that God got tired of us getting it wrong and decided to take on flesh to show us what the mystery was really like. So, was Jesus into power, glory and might? Was Jesus, lord or king-like? He was born in a smelly barn amidst cow manure. He was born into a word of tyranny, abuse of power, cruelty and violence. He was immediately hunted and pursued by its personification, King Herod. He and his family were powerless to do anything about it but run. Jesus started out as a refugee then an immigrant in Egypt. Obviously, I am not a fan of the sanitized, Hallmark card version of Christmas. He was poor. He didn't have an army. He didn't have body guards. He didn't ride into town in a limousine at the end of a motorcade. He did not have the authority to tell or make anyone do anything and He still doesn't. The political and religious powers had Him tortured and executed. Not much of a king/lord. If He wasn't in this life why would He be different after?

Luke 4. *Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority **I will give You**, and their glory; for this has been **delivered to me**, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."* Here was Jesus's chance, Lord, King, He can have it all. Jesus said, "Kiss off." As an aside, Satan said, "I will give you." You can't give what you don't have. Think about that. So much for putting a lot of faith in any political systems.

Jesus did have power but it was the power to heal, the power to bring acceptance to the rejected and wholeness to the broken. Be honest. That is not the kind of power our society worships and admires. Jesus would not have been featured on "Life styles of the

rich and famous". Jesus would not have made the cover of Time. Jesus as president? Matt 11:29 "for I am gentle and humble in heart." Can you imagine a humble person becoming president?

How about God as father? Genesis 1:27 states, "*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*" Looks like the mystery is beyond gender. If you wanted to drive a stern evangelical nuts that insists God is male then a literal translation implies that the divine is bisexual.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "In no way is God in man's image. [God] is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective 'perfections' of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband" (CCC, 370).

Why is the default father instead of mother? Duh. It is called patriarchy and it is a scourge of Christianity, a virulent, vile hidden infection.

So when God does show up what does the mystery look like: a burning bush, a pillar of fire, a dove. My favorite is from 1 Kings 19: 11-13 - "*Then he was told; Go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh. For at that moment Yahweh was going by. A mighty hurricane split the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane, an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire, **a light murmuring sound**. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice came to him, which said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*"

The metaphors we use say a lot about us and a lot about the kind of God we worship.

Lord God almighty Father, King of power and glory. Come to our aid. Vanquish our foe. Smite our enemy. The prayer fits because Kings are into smiting and vanquishing. Prayers like that have been uttered in the name of Christianity for centuries and they are blasphemous. We are to love our enemies and do good to those who would harm us.

Let's try the prayer again but with different metaphors. *Small whisper, humble dove, nurturing mother, come to our aid. Vanquish our foe. Smite our enemy.* It doesn't work anymore.

Lord God almighty Father, King of power and glory I am afraid and alone. I don't know where to turn. Do you even know what that is like? Please help me. Ok.

Small whisper, humble dove, nurturing mother, I am afraid and alone. I don't know where to turn. Do you even know what that is like? Please help me. Much better.

Pastor Victoria Loorz says, *"God as the Patriarch. Christ as the Lord. God as the King. These are all metaphors or images created by people (well, men) at particular times in history to define relationship with sacred reality. These are metaphors that made sense to people who were ruled by violent, imperial monarchs—people who depended on the whims of lords and property owners for their survival. These metaphors also conveniently helped those in charge to legitimate and enforce their power."* Think the divine right of kings. How messed up is that?

"Our image of God creates us—or defeats us. There is an absolute connection between how we see God and how we see ourselves and the universe." —Richard Rohr

I get Lord and King. You want God to direct your life. You want to serve God. You want God to be in charge. Lord and King make sense. Andy Otto says, *"We call God "king" and "lord". By themselves these metaphors can be wonderful and helpful for many in relating to God, but we lose sight of the myriad feminine and non-gendered metaphors throughout the scriptures.*

King and Lord metaphors helped lead to the crusades, "Onward Christian Solders Marching Off to War", "The Battle Hymn of the Republic", "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition". Two totally Christian groups, France, England and the USA on one side and Germany on the other tried to totally annihilate each other in WWI, both sides convinced a warrior God was on their side. How in God's name does any of that jive with love your enemies, do good to those that would harm you and blessed are the peacemakers? Makes me want to weep. If the metaphors would have been humble dove, nurturing Mother, maybe none of that would have happened.

Cut to the chase. Which metaphors are best? Easy. Ones that help you to en flesh the body of Christ. Ones that help you to be like Christ: kind, generous, a champion of the oppressed, a friend of the outcast and lover of enemies. Metaphors that result in acts of mercy. If you see God as a wise owl and that bears Christ like fruit in your life then go for it.

My favorite prayer is from an essay by Brian Doyle. Doyle writes, “The truest words I ever heard about divine love were uttered once by a friend as a grace before a meal. He bowed his head in the guttering candlelight, steam rising from the food before him, the fingers of the cedar outside brushing the window, and said, ‘We are part of a Mystery we do not understand, and we are grateful’” (Brian Doyle, “Joey’s Doll’s other Arm,” *Leaping*, 2003, p. 20)

Let us pray. We are part of a Mystery we do not understand and we are grateful.
Amen. Thank you.

God is Mystery. God is being itself. *How have the images and metaphors you’ve tended to use for God affected your perception of **who God is**?*