

Jesus, Gender, and Toxic Masculinity: Divine-Human Mutuality Ken Wilson, 9.22.19

Today: A vision of God that helps us get over the effects of toxic approaches to gender and socially enforced views of masculinity.

God doesn't simply tell us who we supposed to be, and it's our job to conform to that image. Divine image is already in each of us ... and God allows all of creation to be itself and reveal itself to God. More mutuality in human-divine connection than we often realize.

In Jewish tradition, God as creator had to contract (take up less space) to make room for created order, just as we have to restrain our own thoughts-talking in order to listen. Creation involves an act of divine self-emptying. Jesus participates in this where it says, ***"He didn't count equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself"*** (Phil. 2).

In first Genesis creation poem, God speaks things into being ... but language has a passive quality, "And God said, 'Let there be light, sky, day, night, land, sea, plants'" Not Abracadabra Moment ... I command light! ***Let light*** ... almost ***if light wishes to appear it may***

Written as if God doesn't know what comes into being is exactly, until he sees it...then knows it. "And God saw the light, that it was good?" God has to see the light before knowing it was good. God lets the light reveal itself to God. Gospel song, "I saw the light!" In Genesis, God is sharing that experience with us.

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In first creation poem, the creation is SHOWING OFF to God!

[Good choir directors and orchestra conductors ... signal to the singer, instrumentalists, respond to what they hear]

In 2nd creation story, solitary human is alone so God offers several options and waits for human to state a preference. God doesn't say, ***"Here's a companion, make best of it."*** It's ***"How about this, ... or this?"*** So much room for agency, ability to act, prefer, etc.

Later, God's friend **Abraham** learns of God's plan to punish the violence two towns under certain conditions, says, "Would the God justice not be just? God changes the conditions as a result.

Other times when God changes God's mind at appeal of a human. Maybe that's why in Jewish tradition, **arguing with God** (and each other) is an act of **engagement** and love.

In John 1, Phillip tells Nathaniel, ***“Come see Jesus of Nazareth, prophet Moses foretold”*** N. pushes back, ***“Can anything good come from N?”*** When Jesus sees N, he says ***“Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no guile!”*** Despite N’s snarkiness, Jesus sees the good in Nathaniel, *and it’s same good Nathaniel knows about himself.* ***“We just met, how did you know me?”*** Jesus didn’t just tell N. who N. was---he **saw** who Nathaniel was/affirmed it.

Jesus comes to border of Canaanite territory [enemy territory]. A Canaanite woman cries out to heal her daughter. He doesn’t respond. Disciples urge him to send her away. He answers in a non-sequitur, ***“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”*** [That answer makes sense if they were asking him to help her, but they are not. It’s as if he’s in a conversation w/ himself: should I?]

Hearing this, sensing his ambivalence, she shifts strategy, comes close, says ***“Lord help me”*** He answers ***“It’s not fair to take the children’s bread and give it to the dogs”*** repeating a proverb. She says, ***“Yes, Lord, yet even dogs get scraps from the table”***

Her persistence and verbal skill snaps him out of his confusion: ***“Woman great is your faith, let it be done as you wish!”***

3 Ways to Throw off Yoke of Toxic Masculinities

1. Embrace joy of being wrong when a woman sets you straight.

Toxic masculinity is about muting voice of women. (Happening to the C. woman.) At first, Jesus conflicted-confused: what’s his obligation to a Gentile? His guy friends urge him to send her away. He repeats proverbs he has learned from youth and she artfully turns it against him. Then he’s ***OMG I didn’t see you, we didn’t see you, now I see you! Look at this woman! Listen to this woman.***

Culture exerts its pressure tacitly—we absorb it. [Most progressive white person has absorbed some racism] As men, we have tacitly absorbed—even if we are feminists—idea we’re supposed to be right, our voice is supposed to be advantaged. **Jesus had his tacitly absorbed cultural bias**—heard woman, saw her, saw the light! and experienced joy of being wrong and seeing something new!

Remember, he came to the encounter worn out, depressed—after disputes with elders, disciples ...He ends it energized, seeing something he didn’t see before!

2. Practice being non-anxious, unafraid around human emotion.

Toxic masculinity teaches men to mute their own expression of emotion (except anger) And to **shush** the emotion of women.

If there are people who are freer with their expressions of emotion, practice making space, being non-anxious their emotion.

Episode after episode in which Jesus is approached by people in the throes of strong emotion. Often, the men around him try to shush the emotional expressions, dismiss them, send them away. Jesus gives emotions of others space to be, and is **moved** by the emotions of other [he wept after making space for Martha's weeping] **Pay-off:** more at ease with our own emotions.

3. Lean into the God who makes space for you as you are and don't be afraid to take delight in yourself.

In months before my father's death from cancer, I had a strange feeling that his death would impart some gift to me.

After he died, I fell into depression. Couldn't pray like I had before. I was clearing out his books, and say a little one, ***Beginning to Pray*** by Anthony Bloom. I read it. It introduced me to silence as a form of prayer. Pray for 10 minutes of so, just sitting there, stupidly.

IN one of those praying times, in a stupor—weird happened. "**Ken, meet Ken**" and I knew it was the Spirit.

Most embarrassing thing about it though was this. The Ken I felt the Spirit introduced me to, felt like the Ken I knew secretly and liked secretly ... Also the Ken I tended to mute with others for fear of being rejected, or not accepted or thought to be weird. Again this sound weird to say, but the Ken I didn't think I was supposed to like, but secretly did. Freedom to be myself more.

That's what made it possible for me to step beyond my evangelical constraints. More at ease trusting my instincts. If you're in that box as a pastor and you're gonna change mind on LGBTQ, you better line up your ducks, do your homework, etc.

Before I had done all that, my gut knew these policies were wrong. Part of me **terrified** because I knew the **implications**. But I before working out the

theology and all that, I felt a kernel of internal freedom That if I did the study and came to conclusion, the clobber texts apply I would exercise the option of **conscientious objection**. I knew I had the freedom with God to say "The texts say this, but I think the texts are wrong and I won't do that." My connection to God felt real enough and secure enough that I realized, God and I can live with that.

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers [overcomes oppressor] I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it. (Rev. 2:17)

Israel a rocky place. People knew their stones like a flower gardener knows a gardenia from a petunia. I know granite, pudding stone, Petoskey stone. But they knew Beryl, Agate, Crystal ... a bunch. In Jewish tradition, gemstones represented people. High priest breastplate, twelve gems representing twelve tribes. "Living stones in temple"

Leukos: bright, brilliant [a stone that light shines through would refract all the colors]

In new world we all have a new name that perfectly conveys our true self, no bad or other than us connotations [My father-in-law's dad, "Adolf Huttar"; Ken is now mainly Barbie's boyfriend]

Intimate name, no one knows it but God and us. No one else has the name but you. When we hear it called---Oh that's me and that's God calling me. What's he need now?

Profound mutuality in that. God calls a name and we don't respond, "Oh that's who I'm supposed to be." God speaks a name and we respond, "Oh, that's me" God calls, we verify.

QUIET REFLECTION TIME

Use that as the basis for a meditation. Focus on the feeling of liking. Liking something, liking someone. Pick something that there's no concern, worry, conflict over. {Liking an adorable pet, no concern whether the pet likes you. Or some object. Fisher Space Pen.}

First minute, relax, a few deep breaths (longer to exhaled than inhale) ... picture thing you like ... and focus on feeling of liking.

Then sit with that feeling of like, and consider that God has a name for you that will be unveiled, you will like it, and it will be this special name only you and God know.