

***God-Beyond-Us: the practice of awe***

Meditation/Message

Rev Brigid Beckman

9-15-24

**Meditation**

May I be filled with loving kindness.

May I be free from suffering.

May I be well.

May I be at peace. May I be joyful.

**To those you love:**

May you be filled with loving kindness.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be well.

May you be at peace. May you be joyful.

**To those you find challenging:**

May you be filled with loving kindness.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be well.

May you be at peace. May you be joyful.

**To those who most need it in this moment:**

May you be filled with loving kindness.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be well.

May you be at peace. May you be joyful.

**To mother earth and all beings in creation:**

May all beings be filled with loving kindness.

May all beings be held in loving kindness.

May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings be well.

May all beings be at peace. May all beings be joyful.

**Message:**

Two weeks ago, my talk was inspired by the book, *The Many Faces of Prayer*, written by Unity author and columnist, Thomas Shepherd. As I explored the word “God” and what that means to me, I found myself drawn back to a website that our friend Heather Diddel originally shared with me: [The Integral Christian Network](#) and the *Three Faces of God*, as described by Paul R. Smith.

And in this tiny, three letter word GOD that carries the weight of cultural assumptions, embedded theology, wonder, doubt, confusion, joy, awe– is my “conversation” with *The Many Faces of Prayer* and *The Three Faces of God* that has fed my contemplation, and will continue over the next three weeks.

Today, I’ll explore “**God-Beyond-Us**” and how that face of the mystery might inspire in us a practice of *awe*. Next week, the face of “**God-Beside-Us**” invites us to consider the practice of *relationship*. And on the 29th, the face of “**God-Being-Us**” explores the practice of *embodiment*. Throughout these weeks, my hope is that we find ways to question, to deepen, and to explore our prayer life and spiritual practices as individuals and as a community.

From Paul R. Smith:

***Infinite Face of God-Beyond-Us~A God Big Enough for Our Mind***

Behind the God that Jesus talked about was always the awesome Creator of heaven and earth. Moses was told this face of God-Beyond-Us is the I AM of Infinite Being. Paul taught the Infinite Face of God is “one in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Something of this Infinite Face of God-Beyond-Us was always there in the Jewish culture of Jesus’ day, even though the world was seen in a much smaller and more limited way... In today’s world, we have the “overview effect.”... [described by] Astronaut Bob Behnken... “It is the experience of seeing firsthand the reality of the Earth in space, which is immediately understood to be a tiny, fragile ball of life, ‘hanging in the void,’ shielded and

nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere. From space, national boundaries vanish, the conflicts that divide people become less important, and the need to create a planetary society with the united will to protect this ‘pale blue dot’ becomes both obvious and imperative.”

At an even larger scale, I am fascinated by the glorious images of the vast cosmos taken by the Hubble Space Telescope. When I put myself into them, I experience a little something of the overview effect while contemplating how immense, likely infinite, our universe is.

Theologically, this is an objective, transpersonal, nontheistic, cosmic face of God that we reflect **about**. We can experience this Face of God when we move into a non-ordinary, transcendent state of consciousness... This is the Infinite Face of God-beyond-us.

This awesome Face of God Beyond Us can rise up within us when we *reflect about God* in everyday, thoughtful, mindful consciousness..The Infinite Face of God-Beyond-Us ... is accessed in the spiritual knowing of our head space.

### **Practice of Awe**

- Thomas Shepherd “let it in” face of prayer
  - Become open and receptive to Divine Mind, inflow of divine inspiration:
  - “Personal connection with the animating Force of the Cosmos...the awesome, all-embracing wholeness of all things, muttering a prayer of thanks seems perfectly logical.”

In the book ***This Here Flesh***, writer and liturgist Cole Arthur Riley describes awe as a spiritual practice:

I think awe is an exercise, both a doing and a being. It is a spiritual muscle of our humanity that we can only keep from atrophying if we exercise it

habitually... Awe is not a lens through which to see the world but our sole path to seeing...

When I speak of wonder, I mean the practice of beholding the beautiful. Beholding the majestic—the snow-capped Himalayas, the sun setting on the sea—but also the perfectly mundane—that soap bubble reflecting your kitchen, the oxidized underbelly of that stainless steel pan. More than the grand beauties of our lives, *wonder [awe] is about having the presence to pay attention to the commonplace. It could be said that to find beauty in the ordinary is a deeper exercise than climbing to the mountaintop....*

To encounter the holy in the ordinary is to find God in the liminal—in spaces where we might subconsciously exclude it...

How are *you* encountering the holy? How does this face of *God-Beyond-Us* sit with you? Does it feel uncomfortable to think of God as a presence outside of you— too close to an outdated image of God as the “big man in the sky?” Linda Martella Whitsett thoughtfully reminds us, “God is not a person...God is the One Power in all and through all, Life Itself, Love Itself...The divine is the indescribable yet recognizable Divine Force.”

Yet I am curious about how we reconcile *that* image of the Divine Force with what Thomas Shepherd writes about the myriad traditions where humans have found deep comfort in contemplating the Force of the Cosmos in awe! What happens to our experience of God— the mystery— when we are paying attention to the infinite universe revealed in the night sky *and* in the soap bubble in our sinks?

Will you join me in an *experiment* of practicing awe? Notice what happens when you practice paying attention to your own life and all that is in it? Notice moments where the mundane might be transformed into the sacred by mindful awareness of the Presence.

***The Worst Thing*** by Chelan Harkin

The worst thing we ever did  
was put God in the sky  
out of reach,  
  
pulling the divinity  
from the leaf,  
sifting out the holy from our bones,  
insisting God isn't bursting dazzlement through everything  
we've made  
a hard commitment to see as ordinary,  
stripping the sacred from everywhere  
to put in a cloud man elsewhere  
prying closeness from your heart.

The worst thing we ever did  
was take the dance and the song  
out of prayer  
made it sit up straight  
and cross its legs  
removed it of rejoicing  
wiped clean its hip sway,  
its questions,  
its ecstatic yowl,  
its tears.

The worst thing we ever did is pretend God isn't the easiest thing  
in this universe  
available to every soul  
in every breath.