**“My Shifting Image of God” Teaching & Exercise (thanks to Kris Miller)**

**Thomas Merton:** *You can’t pursue more awareness of God without a pursuit of self-awareness and you can’t pursue more awareness of self without a pursuit of God.*

And if truth be told…our image of self is constantly changing (hopefully that upward lift of pursuing our true self while putting away our false self). But the same thing can be said about our image of God. It shifts. It changes. It grows. It matures.

Theology: our first response: yuck: dry, crusty, doctrines, ‘what we believe’ list, etc. etc.

But here’s the truth about theology. Theology is simply a fancy word for our view of God. Our theology is the set of lenses we use to define the God we serve. You have a theology of God whether you know it or not. Your church has a theology of God (and its often not the same as the words used to describe it!). Even an atheist has a theology of God!

Our theology (view of God) shapes the way you & I do life and conduct our relationship with God, self and others.

Now, here’s the good news & bad news about our view (theology) of God. It changes. It shifts. It evolves. It’s not constant. We say it is unchanging in “doctrinal statements” (and that’s true) but in a deeper truth, our view of God shifts dramatically over time.

So today, I want to begin by giving you our good friend, Kris Miller’s overview on “Our Shifting Image of God.”

**5 Things To Be Aware of When Discussing Our Shifting Image of God.**

1. **Our imagination is a key tool in defining (or picturing) our image of God.**

Imagination, at its core, is simply our way of picturing reality. (image making). We use our imaginations all the time when we are trying to explain reality. Metaphors = images = reality. God is an unseen reality, so even the Scriptures use metaphors/images in describing God.

This idea of using our imagination when defining God is a good news & bad news proposition. God gave us our imaginations, and with it, God can show us some positive, helpful things. But imagination can also open us up to negative experiences. We need discernment, but in truth, we need our imaginations to describe the realities of God.

1. **Our image of God shapes the whole of our lives. Our lives shape our image of God.**

Kris: “No religion is better than its image of God.”

Awareness of our image of God explains the reality of our lives. Our image of God impacts the way we live out our lives. And…the way we live out our lives (ie our experiences) impacts our image of God. Get it?

Kris: “Tell me about your image of God and I’ll tell you about your future.”

(example: Jesus: 1st 2 lines of the Lord’s Prayer 1) Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name (there’s the unique image Jesus has of God)….2) Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven (indicates a life filled with words/deeds to defer all self-will to Thy will).

1. **The language we use to define our image of God will always be limited.**

Words are limited. Language falls short of our desire to explain something.

Words don’t match reality. Words only point to reality.

Fr. Richard Rohr wisely states: “All language is metaphorical. Words are never the thing itself; they can only point toward the thing… (for example) …Words can only point a finger toward the moon; they are not the moon or even its light. They are that by which we begin to see the moon and its light.”

So, it is with all our metaphors/images we use in describing God.

1. **Our primary images of God will evolve over time.**

We tend to begin by making God in our own image. (Stages 1 & 2 - Critical Journey) Then with the help of God, and the help of others, and the help of life experiences, our view of God evolves & matures (Stage 3). Then there are times we enter seasons of transition (Stage 4 and The Wall) when our view of God is evolving in ways we might not appreciate or like. In most cases, over time, our view of God evolves into a bigger, more mysterious, more uncontrollable God (Stages 5 & 6).

Exploring a person’s evolving (changing) view of God can be fascinating. Asking an atheist, for example, “Tell me about the God you no longer believe in?”

In Christian thought there are two views of viewing God:

1. The closer we get to God, the clearer the pictures/words are.
2. The closer we get to God, the less effective our pictures/words are.

The best approach is both/and, not either/or.

1. **It’s important to have some criteria when defining our image of God.**

So, with the use of our imagination & knowing that our views are all limited and always evolving, where is the TRUTH in all this?

What criteria can we use? It’s the following criteria that make our answers “Christian.”

1. The Incarnation: God made flesh. Jesus (in the flesh) is God, incarnate.
2. The Trinity: How has God revealed Himself? Father/Son/Spirit = Three in One. One in Three.
3. The Scriptures: all of the biblical metaphors available to us. Name just a few… warrior, shepherd. There will be, at times, images that seem to contradict each other, yet, in truth, it’s the full range of images that correct each other, keeping us from idolatry!
4. Asking the practical question: does this image bear good/healthy fruit…does it make us Christ-like?...does it bring life or death?