

**Images of God**  
**Reign of Divine Love Sunday, November 26, 2023, 10:00 a.m.**  
**All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Alfredo Feregrino**

I remember, a few years ago when I was ordained as a priest in Seattle, a very dear friend and professors of Hebrew Scriptures at my university gave me as an ordination gift a children's book. The title of the book is "Images of God" by Marie Delval, a book with beautiful illustrations.

Perhaps at that moment, I thought that I would receive as an ordination gift a collection of books on systematic theology, hermeneutics, and all those theologies with "fancy" names, but no, it was a children's book.

In this book, the author points out that it is impossible to know what God looks like, and offers a wide range of expressions of how God has revealed "Godself" to us in the sacred scriptures. She mentioned how the scriptures describe the many ways that we can still discover God in our world. She says that God is joy and wisdom. That God is breath and light, God is silence, God is wind, God is a healer, God is bread, God is life, God is justice, and God is peace and much more.

And it is interesting to mention here that although perhaps sometimes we do not realize it, we use many names to describe God.

We tend to have a specific image of God, which has to do with how we relate to God.

But, if we go a little deeper, we may realize that describing or naming God is sometimes very difficult and to a certain extent insufficient.

God is beyond all humanity, and can never be fully described in our human language.

All human language about God is metaphorical and everything we say about God is a metaphor.

As you know, a metaphor is a figure of speech that basically names one thing by mentioning another and basically helps explain an idea by making a comparison.

So, why is the reason that I talk today about images of God and metaphors?

You may ask...

Because the church traditionally calls this Sunday “Christ the King”. This Sunday is the last Sunday in our liturgical calendar before entering Advent. Can you believe it?

The feast of Christ the King, or Christ the King Sunday is a relatively recent addition to our liturgical calendar. Many churches call this Sunday, the “Reign of Christ” or the “Reign of God”, and here at All Saints we call it the “Reign of Divine Love”.

And as you can see there is no general consensus on what to call this Sunday in many of our churches, because the world “king” is loaded with a lot of baggage. The word “king” is loaded with a surplus of meaning, with some very negative connotations.

As I mentioned before...we use metaphorical language to describe Jesus the Christ as a “King”

And what makes things more complicated is that Jesus and the gospel writers use the language of king and the kingdom thought out the gospels. (*Basileus*-King, *Basileia*-Kingdom in Greek)

Jesus and the gospel writers used an old language, a language in which people at that time were familiar with...

You see, even at that time, the gospel writers faced the same dilemma, lack of accurate language to express what Jesus wanted to convey as his “Kingdom”. Jesus did not talk about a piece of land as his Kingdom. Jesus wanted to convey that there is another way to be and act in the world, where justice, peace and love are possible. This was a completely new paradigm at that time.

I don't know if you can realize, but there are metaphors that are loaded with a surplus of meaning. And these meanings impact how we see or perceive things and impact in how we understand our own reality.

Are you familiar with the series “Game of Thrones” on HBO? I myself really enjoy this kind of epic/fantasy genre.

This story is based on how seven kingdoms or clans fight for control of a divided land and for the Iron Throne that controls them all.

Each faction prepares to assert its claims to the kingdom through agitation, coercion, and war. Brothers conspire against brothers, nation rises against nation, and Kingdom against Kingdom. Remember?

So you see... when we use or the metaphor of “king”, that is what can come to our minds. Right?

Furthermore, many times we don't realize that we tend to romanticize the monarchy ...

I do not know how many people watched the coronation of King Charles on TV few months ago.

The success of one crown comes from the misfortune of others through exile, slavery and plunder as our first lesson pointed out.

In the gospel that we heard today, Pilate ask Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” a question asked in the three synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke)

Are you the King?

So, the metaphor of Christ as King can be a difficult topic for us to reflect on, especially because the idea of kingship is a very outdated concept.

And the image of the king can be problematic.

We have trouble imagining royalty or kingship within our current context living in a representative democracy. (Federal Democratic Republic).

Many of the images we use of God as Lord and God as a King have been embedded within a socio-cultural context of a political system such as patriarchy. Many of these images denote associations of oppression, property, and obedience.

The metaphor of a heavenly king builds upon and support the themes inherent in the game of thrones that I mentioned before – a monarchical model, built on hierarchy, tyranny and oppression.

Theologian Sallie McFague writes that our model of God as king, which saturates our prayers, hymns and liturgies, is inadequate for our 21st century world.

She offers alternate metaphors – using a Trinitarian model of God as Mother, Lover and Friend – those metaphors reconstruct our understanding of God.

The Mother creates,

The Lover, the Beloved redeems

And the Friend sustains.

So, why is the change in language so significant or even meaningful?

Why is it important?

I would say, because metaphors and expressions change, how we actually experience God and how we relate to God.

So I wonder... what are the images of God that you carry with you now?

What is the concept of God that you have?

Or in accordance with the words of theologian Sallie McFague

What it would mean to recognize the World as God's body? Can you imagine?

With the earth at the center of our theology, our everyday choices in consumption and consumerism would reflect the way we think about God, ourselves and the planet – God's body.

Climate change would take on a new urgency. We will become increasingly conscious of the fragility of our world and the impact we have upon it.

We would tread our planet and everything that inhabits and contains it as a sacred ground.

So, no more injustices, wars, and oppression. We will discover that we are interconnected and that we all are one.

Can you imagine that world?

So I invite you to consider what kinds of metaphors for God might help us in this time in our world? In the world within us and the world around us

I wonder,

What is your image of God now?

Have you ever thought about it?

I can tell you mine,

I can tell you that my image of God as this time is God as Holy Mystery,

And I tell you at this time now, because our images of God evolve and change.

My image of God now, is not the same as when I was a child. The one I learned in Sunday school at that time, I believed of God as a bearded old man sitting in a throne.

Now my image of God, is a Holy One who is interconnected (with and in) ourselves and with all aspects of the universe. A God who aims to unity. A God that manifests and continues communicating with us here and now. A loving God who walks with us, suffers with us and never leaves us.

But language is limited as we know, and this is my attempt to use language to describe my image of God.

You know, how we imagine God makes all the difference, determining how we relate to the Holy, how we think of the world and how we are related to one another.

So I wonder again,

What is your image of God now?

If you do not have a clear image now, do not worry. It will come; those images will come when we pay attention. They will come when we are open to receive them.

And that image may come to you when you least expect it.

Going back to the children's book that I received at my ordination, the author says at it is impossible to know what God looks like ...

And yes,

I believe there is an image sent directly to you that flows through some unexplained and unexpected channels

So, I invite you to be open to that,

You know, God is present at the very heart of our human experience.

So, invite you to be where you can experience God's presence to receive that revelation.

And that can be when you walk on a sunny day, when you sit and listen to the wind. In the presence of nature. When you contemplate the waves in the ocean. In the smile of a child.

And that can be when we engage in acts of justice, when we work for peace.

When we serve and feed the hungry, clothed the naked, visit the sick and those in jail. When we welcome the other.

How God revealed Godself to us, that message, that revelation, might come in silence and in prayer.

So, my prayer for today is for you to be open to that gift, a gift of revelation. I invite you to be open to see how God expresses God-Self in you and in your life. I invite you to receive God's dream for all of us... knowing that there is another way to be and to act in the world.

**Amen!**

***A note from the preacher:*** *Because sermons are meant to be preached and therefore prepared with emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*