



*The God Who Embraced Me*

*Psalm 147: 1-11, 20c*

February 4th, 2018

Communion Sunday and 5th Sunday after Epiphany

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

I want you to listen to this.

Video/audio of John W. Fountain talking about God as “Abba”.

I believe in God. Not that cosmic, intangible spirit-in-the-sky that Mama told me as a little boy "always was and always will be." But the God who embraced me when Daddy disappeared from our lives — from my life at age four — the night police led him away from our front door, down the stairs in handcuffs.

The God who warmed me when we could see our breath inside our freezing apartment, where the gas was disconnected in the dead of another wind-whipped Chicago winter, and there was no food, little hope and no hot water.

The God who held my hand when I witnessed boys in my "hood" swallowed by the elements, by death and by hopelessness; who claimed me when I felt like "no-man's son" amid the absence of any man to wrap his arms around me and tell me, "everything's going to be okay," to speak proudly of me, to call me son.

I believe in God, God the Father, embodied in his Son Jesus Christ. The God who allowed me to feel His presence — whether by the warmth that filled my belly like hot chocolate on a cold afternoon, or that voice, whenever I found myself in the tempest of life's storms, telling me (even when I was told I was "nothing") that I was something, that I was His, and that even amid the desertion of the man who gave me his name and DNA and little else, I might find in Him sustenance.

I believe in God, the God who I have come to know as father, as Abba — Daddy.

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So who is this God that John Fountain came to know as “abba;  
the God whose warmth  
filled his belly “like hot chocolate on a cold afternoon”?

It is the One who knows the number of the stars  
in an ever expanding  
infinite Universe;

the One who broke the Darkness of Creation  
with Light  
before throwing  
the sun,  
the moon,  
and the stars against the heavens.

It is the One who heals the brokenhearted,  
and binds up the wounds of the wounded.

That’s a big God  
but a God that is not so big that He does not care for each and every one of us.

It is a God who listens to the smallest and most mundane prayer  
as well as the gut-wrenching cry of a broken soul.

A woman once confessed to her minister (not me) that she feared she “misused” God.

As you can imagine, all kinds of thoughts when through the minister’s head; “What could she have possibly done?” “What was she about to confess?” “Can you really misuse’ God?”

Bracing herself, the minister invited to parishioner to go on. Well, the woman couldn’t find her car keys for the life of her. She searched high and low; her purse, the nightstand beside her bed. She even searched in the refrigerator -- she had a tendency to be easily distracted -- but no luck.

Finally, she said a little prayer asking God to help her find her keys. And you know, within minutes she remembered that the last time she used her keys she was wearing a little worn coat. She checked the coat pocket and viola! She found the keys! “God’s got a whole lot more important things to worry about than my keys,” she continued.

“Nonsense,” the minister replied. “If God cares for the sparrow, God certainly cares for you and your lost keys.” God’s cares for us is like the love a good daddy has for his children; God loves us like an attentive mother cares for her nursing child.

Our Psalm reminds us that God only threw the stars into the heavens but knows their number. Such knowledge is whole, complete. It is, I believe, what Paul meant when he wrote, For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (I Corinthians 13: 12) The Psalm also tells us that God is cloaked not in a “cloak of invisibility” like in the Harry Potter books, but in unfathomable mystery. In my office I have a quote from my father that I found after his death and put it in my church office. “My variety of Christianity is not used to explain everything. It accepts and appreciates (the) mystery.” God’s unfathomable mystery is what theologians call Transcendence.

The word itself literally means “to surpass”. It refers to the “Otherness” of God. Many years ago J.B. Phillips wrote a little book entitled “Your God Is Too Small”. In it he expressed how we try to shrink God into our understanding. C.S. Lewis wrote about this in his “Chronicles of Narnia”.

In the first book the children, Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy ask if the lion Aslan, the God figure, is safe. Their question is met with the shocking response, “Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.” (The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, chapter 8, “What Happened After Dinner)

God is not limited to what our minds can conceive, nor is God’s Goodness confined to our understanding of Goodness. The psalmist marveled that God is neither bound by human frailty, nor stymied by human limits. This Table, the sacrament that we are about to participate in, reminds us that our God is big enough to care, for lost keys, lost souls, hungry children, homeless children, refugees and country club members alike.

God cares for each of us equally, and invites those who take Jesus seriously to care for the least, the last and lost, too. God is present in the day to day activities of our lives. God is both Transcendent and Immanent, or within us. It is this God who John W. Fountain, like Jesus, called “abba”, father.

It is who we can call “abba”, too.