

**“Saviors of God”  
a sermon by Rev. Preston Moore  
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Nancy Shaffer, the author of the poem Franz just read, is not only a fine poet, but also a UU minister. If she offered a course on God, I surely would enroll. I’m no poet, so were I to teach a course on God, it would have to be more prosaic than poetic.

On the first day of such a course, I would disavow any intention of taking my students on a tour of God The Concept. For that, I would refer them to Mortimer Adler’s fine book, How To Think About God, in which he marches expertly through the multivolume reasoning of Thomas Aquinas and others, and offers his own compelling conception of what, logically, God must be like. Instead I would offer an experiential rendering of God.

I would begin this sketch by admitting that when I say “God,” I don’t know what I’m talking about; but I believe it’s okay to talk about something without knowing exactly what it is, or maybe even approximately what it is. I would explain that, in my view, if God were to talk about me in some kind of “infinitesimal,” he wouldn’t know what he’s talking about either; but I hope he would go right ahead. That each of us would be regarded as somewhat mysterious in the domain of the other shouldn’t shut down all communication.

Neither of us knows what the other might do next. We’re willing to be surprised, God and I. In fact, we expect it and even hope for it. God doesn’t want me to be a pious, predictable mouse scuffling out of my mousehole every Sunday morning to squeak forth a dutiful hymn of praise. And I don’t want God to be my Rock of Ages.

I make no demands of God for proof of anything – not even his existence. No straightening out of crooked rivers, no talking rocks, no burning bushes. No miracles at all, beyond the miracle of my sensing his presence. Likewise, he makes no demands of proof from me. I don’t have to amount to anything. God has never asked to see my resume. He has no standards and would flunk out of polite society immediately for his lack of discrimination. This indifference to proof is very freeing on both sides of the relationship.

We play games, God and I, but we don’t exactly keep score. Mostly, the point of the game is to prolong it, for the joy of playing. To use a football metaphor, it doesn’t matter if I’m 40 points behind late in the fourth quarter – I can still win. As someone who feels like he didn’t play the game of spirituality very energetically for the first half-century of his life, this is good news.

In terms of the principles by which humans tend to think the universe is governed, God is a bit of a scofflaw. I guess someone might even say he’s a bad influence, because he encourages me to be a scofflaw too. In human life, most people assume the past is the past, what’s done is done. But God is always introducing me to sly ways to rewrite my past. When I change in ways

that go very deep, which is usually the kind of game he and are playing, my past has a way of changing along with me – being put in an entirely different light.

Something similar happens with energy, which is supposed to be governed by some kind of principle of scarcity. As if there's only so much of it, so we have to hoard it. But God always seem to have plenty of it, and when I sense his presence most strongly, that seems to rub off on me. Things that ordinarily would use me up seem to generate energy rather than burning it. When this is happening, I still get tired, of course, but it's not a feeling of being depleted or burned out.

God seems to have the same attitude of abundance about space that he has about time and energy. He's always able to give me room to get bigger. I don't mean in physical or material ways so much as in spiritual ways. More able to hold experiences, to open my heart wider to whatever life has to offer. I try hard to give him plenty of room too. I don't want to say no when he gets expansive about giving me a bigger world or a bigger life, with bigger challenges. But I do say no sometimes, and then, eventually, I remember the game we're playing, and why I don't really want to say no after all.

God and I communicate. We do it indirectly. I communicate by how I live my life, and God communicates by how the world is given to me again and again. Often I sense God's presence vividly in books.

In Isak Dineson's story "The Young Man With the Carnation," a young writer feels great despair over his work. He dithers over whom he should be trying to please, and how, and whether it even makes sense to try any more. God appears to him and says "Come, I will make a covenant between Me and you. I, I will not measure you out any more distress than you need to write your books . . . . But you are to write the books. For it is I who want them written. Not the public, not by any means the critics, but Me, Me!" "Can I be certain of that?" asks the writer? "Not always," God replies. Reading this was like opening a letter addressed to me personally.

I feel like God and I are kin, through that spark of the divine in me. You could say that God took a big risk in carving off a divine piece of himself and giving it to me – kind of like giving a relative a kidney. It left him in the position of remaining connected to me, while completely letting go of any control over me. That's what comes with giving away divinity. That took a lot of trust – trust that I would do something appropriate with that gift, and a willingness to be disappointed if I didn't.

I want to be seen and loved by God; and he wants to be seen and loved by me. Each of us knows the other has choice about this. God sees and loves me in giving me the world to live in and giving me me in it, with all the complexities that entails. I see and love God in moving toward greater authenticity in my own life, expressing both my creative divinity and my animal nature. This reciprocal love and need for love is not the way God is talked about in most religious discourse; but the idea does show up now and then. When it does, I get a sense of a message of great authority being sent and received.

As the radical Christian theologian Dorothee Soelle has stated, “At best, what Protestant theology and preaching articulate . . . can be summed up as follows. God loves, protects, renews, and saves us. One rarely hears that this process can be truly experienced only when such love, like every genuine love, is mutual. That humans love, protect, renew, and save God sounds to most people like megalomania or even madness. But the madness of this love is exactly what mystics live on.”

From what could an infinite, divine being be saved -- and by humans no less? Well, from the disability of omnipotence. The one thing God cannot do is struggle against limits, triumph over fallibility, come to terms with mortality. Until humans do these things, as **ONLY** humans can do, God is incomplete. When humans exercise their divine creativity in these mortal struggles, they express their love for God.

This conception overturns the vertical geometry of conventional theology – the notion of a perfect God above, wanting nothing, and needy humans below, wanting everything. The infinite realm of the universal being is suddenly seen as having a confining aspect, and the cramped quarters of time and space are suddenly seen as a vast playing field for human acts of faith that complete and liberate God.

God’s Hebrew name, Yahweh, means “I am.” Through the given world, God is singing God’s name to humanity, over and over again. I am, I am, I am. And when we sense the presence of God and live out of that awareness, we are singing our name back to God, over and over again. We are we are we are. God is releasing us from the jail of being mere machines made of meat, and we are releasing God from the jail of being merely infinite potential. This mutual love is reverberating back and forth across the doorway between forever and the here and now.

So my relationship with God has an overarching quality of mutuality – with one important exception. It concerns remembering and forgetting. God’s memory is perfect. Mine is very spotty. I go back and forth between remembering and forgetting that I have a spark of the divine within me. God is very patient about this, and his patience is being rewarded. I’m getting better and better about remembering.

The forgetful spaces between rememberings are getting shorter and shorter. I can see the day coming when I actually might have a kind of faint edge of remembering present all the time, even when I’m being forgetful -- all caught up in my various animal dramas. If that happens, it will mean I am getting more and more enlightened; that my life is getting more and more light-hearted, more playful. More like what life really is, which is . . . a play. Or a whole repertory season of plays, each of them concluding on a benedictory note of appreciation, like that expressed with great concision by the poet, ee cummings:

how fortunate are you and I,  
we who have wandered down  
from fragrant mountains of

eternal now,  
to frolic in such mysteries  
as birth and death a  
day (or maybe even less).

Fortunate indeed. Fortunate beyond measure. Whether given to speaking in poetry or in prose,  
in the name of God, amen.