

The Untethered Gospel

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Mary Elizabeth Hanchey

Twilight on the coast is magical. The smearing together of dark and light, water and sky, heaven and earth.

The colors are exquisite. It's purple here. And orange here. And the space in between is this gorgeous ombre that seems impossible to reproduce or to untangle. It simply exists and is stunning.

And I don't always have words for all of that beauty that lies between because it is not easily categorized as one thing or another.

Perhaps you have heard the quip: Good job God! And perhaps that is the best thing we can say.

But I can name the edges. I can name dark and light, water and sky, heaven and earth.

And that reminds me of the way our creation story is told:

- In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and darkness Night.
- And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky.
- And it continues - God made sea and land. God made Sun and Moon. God made humans, male and female.

Our foundational stories are told with words that describe the edges. Or boundaries. Or binaries. There is this and there is that. But we know there is so much more than those edges. Oh how glorious it is to stand with our toes immersed in sea and sand, watching the smearing of heaven and earth - of dark and light, of water and sky. The edges are simply points of reference for beauty that is, itself, not tethered to these margins.

And so it is with this remembering that we read the scripture for today.

The scripture for today portrays women as existing at all. They are described as mothers and daughters. A little digging tells us that the verb tenses in the Samuel passage are

feminine, so Hannah is not only existing but leading the action: her husband is following. In the Psalm, daughters are described as cornerstones for a palace (as strong and of foundational significance). Mothers and fathers get equal attention in the Mark passage which includes throwback to the 10 Commandments. Honor your mother as well as your father.

And these acknowledgments that women exist all are of significance as we push against the patriarchy that haunts the Judeo-Christian tradition. They should not be missed as markers of inclusion. Dr. Gafney says "in these lessons I suggest reading [women] as emblematic of the fullness of the people, of Israel, of God, of the Church, regularly obscured by those who hold the center of attention."

Indeed, looking for women in the texts begins the work of inclusion. There are too many spaces in the world, in our communities, in our churches, in our homes - too many spaces where humans are excluded or limited simply because they exist as women. There are too many spaces where humans are abused simply because they exist as women. The church is called into the ministry of truth telling, of sharing a gospel in which women are valued and respected. And the church is called into the ministry of justice creating - of overturning systems where women are abused and impoverished.

But this work of looking for women in the texts does not complete the work of inclusion. We cannot accidentally be satisfied with that. We cannot miss the harm that leaning into gender binaries can do. And we should not miss the exquisite beauty of all that comes between the edges.

We are invited to look more carefully at our communities in light of these texts. Dr. Gafney suggests - "Together these lessons call our attention to the vast inclusive nature of our communities, particularly those members who are often overlooked."

That word "intention" is striking. Because it is not "attention," - which I kind of expected to find in that sentence. But "intention." I wonder what work "intention" does that "attention" does not. Does it call us to more thoughtful acknowledgement about who we ARE, and not who we acknowledge? Is there something more holistic and formative about our "intention" than about our "attention."

Today, in particular, we have the opportunity to hear more about gender identity - and our transgender siblings. I hope you will join us for the Adult Forum after the service.

Hear this.

Family of God, this is the good news: Jesus who redeems us made a habit of turning his attention - and intention - away from those who hold the center of attention and toward

those who are often overlooked. Jesus' redeeming love overcomes our human habits of categorizing and labeling. Jesus' redeeming love is for you, and for me, and all our splendid and messy beauty.

And Family of God - this is the call on our lives: we must do the work of digging, of unearthing, of overcoming the habits of story telling that center certain folk over others. Our work is to set the gospel free from dangerous and centering habits that obscure the whole story of our redemption. Our work is to stand with our toes immersed in sea and sand, watching the smearing of heaven and earth - of dark and light, of water and sky. The edges are simply points of reference for beauty that is, itself, not tethered to these margins.