

Problem: Does God feel emotion?

-The Disney/Pixar movie *WALL-E* plays around with the question of emotion. Namely: can a machine have feelings? For those who haven't seen the movie, it's a wonderful children's film which is also an interesting social commentary. The story is of this little robot, WALL-E, who lives in an almost post-apocalyptic world where human beings have left the earth as their trash dump. The machine "falls in love" with another drone, EVE. The story, then, follows WALL-E chasing after his love, following EVE after she is snapped up from earth and brought back to the human space station where all people on earth now live a hollow, distracted life. The writers and director of this film obviously work hard to anthropomorphize WALL-E and cheer the little robot on in his honorable endeavor. It's a great film!

-Now stick with me for one second as I suggest to you this morning that the writers of many Old Testament books (like the book of Exodus where our story of God and Moses come today) are doing a very similar thing to the writers of the film WALL-E. They are contextualizing and anthropomorphizing God. Think about it: all throughout, especially the story of the Exodus, God has conversations with multiple people, God tries to fix or correct things when they go wrong, God tries to sway the opinions of leaders and pharaohs, and most importantly God expresses emotion.

-Perhaps a slightly different take on what makes a human being than our current "I think therefore I am" mentality, ancient biblical writers focused much more, I believe, on emotions making a human being human. Moses cowering before Pharaoh, the prophet Jonah indignant toward the Ninevites, Jeremiah weeping for his people. Emotions are what make us.....US! Human!

-So, no wonder then, the first thing ancient Jewish writers give God in these texts to make the divine more relatable are...emotions: "And God saw that it was good..and rested."

-So what should we make of a God with emotions? Do you agree with the OT writers? Should the divine power feel emotion?

Solution: The Divine is beyond our understanding, yet what we do understand points to something with a heart. Sometimes this heart gets broken.

-I think there is a limit to our understanding God as just a human being. The divine is, of course, beyond our complete understanding and should be understood to incorporate many things beyond the human self. But I believe, as the OT writers did, that the humanness of God is a powerful one, something that truly connects us to something beyond ourselves. Infact, In a lot of ways I personally connect with the God of the Old Testament much more than the connected, yet a little separated, "father" God figure of the New Testament (Jesus Christ aside, of course).

-I can connect with the God of this Exodus story for today. Here God has done all of these things: get this guy Moses to come and talk to Pharaoh, send plagues, defend the

Israelites from attack, lead the group by pillar of fire and cloud. Yet, now they get so stubborn, that they decide to create a God for themselves. Some Christian theologians read this story as a cut and dry “golden-calf-you-shall-have-no-other-gods” type of story. God gets angry because these people have broken a commandment and Moses saves them from wrath. I don’t think it’s so simple.

-As one contemporary bible commentator wrote: “We should call this story not as it is commonly known (the story of the golden calf), but the story of the broken hearted God.”

-This is a broken hearted God if I ever saw one: “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.” (verses 9-10) Can’t you just picture God so frustrated and hurt in this sentence? As God is saying this, I can picture the divine crunched up on a bolder sobbing. When taken in a heartbroken context, this condemnation makes a lot more sense.

-Let me touch on this for just a bit longer because it’s important. One problem that we are faced with in the Old Testament in a very unique way is God in some cases doing acts of violence (defeating enemy cities of the Israelites) or inciting violence which happens here. Holding this in tension with a God of love, peace, and justice can be really challenging and almost impossible for some of us who have been severely scarred by abuse and violence in our life histories.

-The historical context for the violence in the Old Testament is incredibly complicated and more than one sermon can touch on this morning. But I do want to stress that maybe this is a part of the anthropomorphic image of God in our Exodus story that we cannot accept. It’s too problematic, it’s too much against the other images and promises of God that has given us and creation. Maybe the ancient writers got it wrong. God was not within the defeat of enemy armies or killing of women in children, even if the Israelites thought God was.

-If we circle back to our specific Exodus today, however, maybe our God who is brokenhearted, crumpled up on a rock, wanting to be alone, can help us understand these violent words said to Moses. If we think again about the movie, *WALL-E*, the reason why we relate to this robot so much on the screen is because the writers have masterfully been able to incorporate a spectrum of emotions. WALL-E becomes human because he is able to feel an array of feelings. That’s, in the end, what makes us human too. One of the reasons why we love biographies of famous people in well known events so much is because we are able to be let in more to the array of emotions these leaders were feeling at pivotal moments. FDR certainly didn’t just feel courageous as he stood up in front of Congress saying “today will live in infamy”. Of course he was afraid, angry, anxious, mournful. He wouldn’t be a human being if he didn’t feel all of these things.

-The same can be true for God in a lot of ways. God is much more complex than just love, peace, and joy. And if that were all that God was, God would be pretty flat.

-How many of you have gotten so hurt, so frustrated, so angry that you have said something stupid to another person? F* you! Go to *! I know I have. Not things I am proud of, but at the same time, they are a piece of my humanness: my array of emotions.

-I read God's comments of burning wrath and even bribing Moses with "another nation" as just this kind of thing. It was a brokenhearted God sobbing and shaking the divine's fist in the air and saying: "What the (bleep)?!"

Implication: What is our relationship to a God with emotions?

-Then there is Moses. Slowly, carefully, intentionally sitting down by God on that rock and doing something extraordinary. He comforts and pleads to save his people, yes. That's the traditional way of looking at it. But I think he does something much more. He actually reminds God of who God is and the role God must play. He reminds God of the promises the divine made to him and to the people of Israel and how the divine "never gives up on those promises". We always think of ourselves as the ones needing to be comforted and "helped up" by God. How many times do we see ourselves as the ones comforting and "helping God up"? How many times do we think of ourselves as the ones who need to remind God of who God is?

-Maybe this is how we can go into our prayer life this next week, realizing that God and us can be a two-way street. Maybe in emotional times, we can serve to lift each up and to remind each other who we are. May this relationship be blessed and may we come to seeing God and ourselves in deeper ways. Amen.