

### Really, What's the Point?

People like to comment about the contents of the Bible. There is too much violence. Miracles are unbelievable. God is mean; I wouldn't worship a God who destroys entire groups of people. This is supposed to be a holy book and people behave *that way*? You follow *that* God? (The book of Job will frequently come up in the conversation at this point as an example of an arbitrary deity.)

I propose another point of view. I mean that literally – not a point of view like an opinion, but a place from which you are viewing. The point of your viewing. I propose that the Holy Bible is holy because it contains so much that is human. I hesitate to say “all that is human,” because who am I to say? It presents vividly men and women in all kinds of life situations meeting them with varying degrees of skill and grace. The Bible also contains human understandings of an Almighty God, understandings which change over periods of time, and these changes are reflected in the Bible.

Hebrew and Greek texts depict all kinds of human experience: despair and reproach (the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings reproaching Elijah), pettiness (Jonah angry that God did not destroy Ninevah), wild rejoicing (David dancing wildly when the Ark of the Covenant finally arrived in Jerusalem), erotic poetry (Song of Solomon), vicious behavior (Joseph and *his brothers*), forgiveness (*Joseph* and his brothers again), extraordinary heroism, generosity, sacrifice, the apparent senselessness of suffering and supreme religious experiences. The Bible also offers phenomena we are not accustomed to: miracles, God speaking to people in everyday language, God speaking in night dreams, and people taking their dreams seriously. It is a compendium of all kinds and sorts of human emotions and moods and much to make us puzzle for real.

There are times when, as our responsive Psalm today says, we have wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, our souls have fainted within them. We don't like to advertise these times. Perhaps we are ashamed of being so frail. We may even think we are sick or something is terribly wrong and this should not be happening. Why is it happening? What is the point? But it is happening, when it is. The reality of that desert wandering experience is affirmed as worthy of inclusion in our scripture. Worthy of attention. Worthy of being expressed. Lo and behold, it is alright to be human.

“The book of Ecclesiastes is one of literature's earliest encounters between faith and reason. The author struggles to believe that life is meaningful despite his experience of the world. The book's inclusion in the Hebrew Bible is...remarkable, testifying to Judaism's interest not only in divine revelation, but also in [human] exploration of the meaning of life and mortality.” (<http://azure.org.il/article.php?id=214>)

I think Ecclesiastes is fascinating and refreshing. In addition to our desert wanderings, we all have times when nothing seems to matter at all. Nothing is worth doing. Everything is pointless: work, family, house, accomplishments. The author of the book “is weighed down by the collapse of meaning, which is revealed by the

contradictions that pervade life. These he repeatedly calls *hevel* – ‘absurd’ or ‘senseless.’ [The author] is frustrated that life does not make sense. The irrationality of the world is his fundamental grievance, and his other complaints – such as the brevity of life, the futility of effort, the triviality of worldly goods...[and] the anomalies in divine justice – are secondary to this one: [life does not make sense].”

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If you are interested in finding out what your point is, here is the thing you cannot avoid. You actually have to stop. You have to just stop. What you’re doing. What you are perpetually talking about. What you are not doing. You have to pull yourself out of the mindless routines that we all fall prey to. Nothing is wrong with routines, don’t mistake me. But to rediscover the point – or discover it for the first time – you have to cultivate stillness and silence and you have to be intentional about that.

Mindfulness practices are getting attention in this church. Such practices are aimed at slowing yourself down enough so that you have a fighting chance of seeing what the point is. Slowing down enough to step back and take a look at your life. I have noticed recently that I am sending personal emails that are simply not being read, by my friends! Even if they contain information that was requested. The people in my life are seemingly so rushed, deluged with information and what all, that when they shoot an email back asking for the same information, I simply resend my first email response.

The first thing you may need to confront is that there is no point. Inherent. In anything. Maybe you are the one who creates the point, the purpose, or the meaning for whatever you are investing in. I had a coach once who would ask me, when I was making a presentation, “And the point is....?” She was relentless. I had to cut out the story, the explanation, and the details and get to the point I wanted to make that I often did not know that I wanted to make. I had to STOP the narrative and really look: where am I going with this? What do I want to leave people with? Then, having nailed down where I was going and why, I could speak clearly and people were with me. “And the point is...” is a very powerful practice. I saw that I was the one who got to say what the point was. That was her point.

When the farmer demands that Jesus intervene and influence his brother to share the inheritance, Jesus uses it as a teaching moment. First, he refuses to be coopted and manipulated. That handled, he tells the story of a farmer who misses what was important in life. Jesus was constantly asking questions that made people stop in their tracks. “Do you want to be healed?” “Why don’t you feed them yourself?” “Who made me judge and mediator?”

Allowing ourselves to be in the mood of the author of Ecclesiastes is important. We may need to be flummoxed in order to uncover our authentic questions. We may need to stop and ponder and wonder and find out for ourselves: really, what is the point? Only the person in your seat can answer that. AMEN