



August 3, 2008

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Psalm 8

“God IS; God is GOOD”

I learned two prayers as a young child:

Now I lay me down to sleep....

And the table grace:

God is great; God is good; let us thank him for our food.

This simple table prayer sums up the core of our faith. What do we believe as Christians? First, we believe there is a God. God EXISTS. God IS. We also believe that God is GOOD.

Let's consider some indicators that point to the existence of God. I will share five of these—so we can even use our fingers to try to remember them. Some may surprise you.

1) Science

Many see science and faith as opposing one another. As the daughter of a scientist, the wife of a scientist and the mother of two scientists I do not share that view. As we explore every aspect of creation, we are awed by the immensity and complexity of the vast universe and intricate sub-atomic world. Everything reveals an interconnectedness and awe-inspiring detailed design. Albert Einstein himself believed in some creative force or being behind everything that is.

2) History

History reveals the limits of human wisdom and power. Humans alone do not appear to have the capacity to bring about a perfect world or life potential. Human

greed appears again and again, like weeds sprouting in the garden. Unchecked human power corrupts--- we seem to need some wisdom and power beyond our own to resist the worst of our own nature. My father taught me a saying that he applied to various events as they occurred through the years of my childhood and adolescence: “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

3) Human personality

And yet, people, with all their faults, are creatures of dignity and potential. Another saying teaches, “Water cannot rise higher than its source.” There seems to be some source of goodness that we spring from, that shines out through us at our best.

4) Hunger

There seems to be an urge in the human heart to find God. Consider:

- we have a hunger impulse, and there is FOOD;
- we have a desire for companionship, and there are FAMILY and FRIENDS;
- we feel thirst and there is WATER;
- we yearn for a life partner, and there is LOVE and MARRIAGE;

It seems probable that we would not have a hunger for God if there were no God to satisfy it.

5) Heroes and Heroines

There is a certain kind of life that flows out of a belief in God. A person whose life is rooted in God:

- shows deep sympathy for others
- suffers more bravely
- finds peace in turmoil
- exudes a kind of deep joy, contentment and happiness.

We are drawn to such people. We like, admire and treasure them.

SO—let’s REVIEW. As Christians we believe that God IS; God exists.

Indicators that point to this truth and help us believe it come to us through: science, history, human personality, a hunger for God, and heroes and heroines.

However, belief in God’s existence is NOT the heart of the Christian faith. God not only exists, but God is a certain KIND of being—a GOOD one. God is GOOD. This is the heart of our faith.

Once again, we can use our fingers to remember five things about our good God.

1) Creator

God made everything. God is still making all kinds of things. God is the author of ALL goodness, beauty, bounty and love. The apostle Paul highlighted this truth while preaching in the pagan city of Athens. He spoke about having seen a temple built to honor an “unknown” God. He went on to say, “I know this unknown God—and want to tell you about him. He came to us in a human person, a man named Jesus of Nazareth.” Paul believed they already had an awareness of the good God who came to us in Christ, through the goodness and beauty of creation.

2) Personal

God is known in relationship—directly, through prayer and indirectly, through others.

Think about the baptismal vows, when we offer ourselves as the instruments of God’s love in the life of a child. Think about the teaching of Christ, that tells us whatever we do to anyone, we do it to Christ himself. We are agents of God when we follow Christ’s teachings.

3) Non-coercive

God does not force us to do or be anything. God allows us to choose. This permits evil, which can produce pain. At times we struggle with God’s decision here—but if we had no freedom to CHOOSE, love could not exist. Anything that is forced or required cannot be love. God’s willingness to be non-coercive is part of his goodness.

4) Judge

God holds us accountable and is the source of consequences for SIN. This may also be hard for us to identify as part of God’s goodness, but it is. Some years ago, my husband and I rented the film “Amistad”. It’s based on the true story of a slave ship which came to North America. At one point, when the ship was in trouble, the captain decided they would need to throw over some ballast, to lighten the ship. What was the ballast? The ship’s cargo, of course. What was the cargo? The people—the slaves. Men, women and children were chained together on deck, then thrown into the sea, where the weight of the chains pulled them down. At this disturbing point in the movie, my husband blurted, “I hope there’s a hell, and that those men are suffering there!” This was unusual for my husband--- he’s in love with God’s grace and is not a hellfire and damnation kind of guy. But at that moment he KNEW---- evil cannot go unpunished. God is clear about that. His goodness refuses to overlook wrong.

5) Deliverer

God will not overlook wrong. Evil cannot go unpunished. But God’s goodness became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. His goodness gave up his life for us, paying for all our wrongs through his OWN suffering and death. Our

faith reveals a supremely good God. God went the ultimate distance to save us from ourselves.

I didn't recognize this so well as a young person. I was somewhat blissfully ignorant of my faults and sin. Then I got married and had children—pretty young, actually- married at 19 and a mom by 20. Suddenly I noticed all these horrible flaws I possess. I saw that I had inherited a bit of my Dad's "Irish temper". I could be impatient, and sometimes demanding.

As the years have passed, I have mellowed in many ways. I'm a bit more patient and less demanding. I might be more humble—I hope that I am. Life itself has taught me many of these things. BUT THERE ARE STILL INNUMERABLE moments in my life when I catch myself being an idiot, displaying attitudes or behavior that I know God deplors. There are times when I find myself thinking, "Oh Lord, it's a really good thing Jesus died for our sins. Otherwise I'd be sunk."

There is another way in which God is a deliverer. He saves us from our sins. He also brings us through hardships that come out of nowhere. We don't know why cancer exists. It's a horrible disease that comes and steals away people we love. We don't know why any illness is necessary. We don't know why volcanoes and tsunamis have to be a part of this world. People are hurt, they are injured and suffer. Children are orphaned, homes are lost.

I do not know why this must be. But I do believe that come what may, COME WHAT MAY—God will bring us through. God will deliver us from suffering and death.

As Christians we believe that God IS; God exists.

Science, history, human personality, a hunger for God, and heroes and heroines all help us see that God IS.

As Christians we believe that God is GOOD.

Goodness shines through our God who is the Creator, and our personal, non-coercive Judge and Deliverer.

God is good; God is great; let us thank him for our food----- for our physical food that sustains us, and for our spiritual food we receive through the sacrament of communion this morning. God IS and God is GOOD. What good news for the world. Amen.