

Sermon June 25, 2017 Who Cares? Cara B. Hochhalter

Genesis 21:8-21 and Matthew 10:26-31

Who cares? These two words can be a flip expression, a kind of retort when someone has been too wrapped up in themselves...maybe worried about wardrobes or makeup or ...cleaning? Who cares? Who really cares if my house is spotless? Who cares if my hair is just so...who cares if a certain sports team wins or loses? Watch it now, I may be treading on sensitive territory! Who cares!?

Listen to this phrase in other contexts... what would "who cares?" mean theologically...?

What would "who cares?" mean about our society today? Who really cares, for heaven's sake?

What about politically? *Who* cares and we might add, what do they care about?

And how about with an eye to these sparrows on the cover...what does "who cares?" mean in an environmental context.... *who cares* for creation?

Who cares about the justice issues of immigration deportations, refugee rejections, prison conditions, racism, healthcare cut backs, and those suffering drastically from war....*who* cares? Does God care, do we care?

How about when someone shares their day-to-day struggles with you... Who cares? Do you?

Let us be in prayer: God who cares, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

First let's think about how *God* might care....how does GOD....care? Or is this too much of an anthropomorphic thing to think about? Making God like a person. I guess it depends how you consider God. If you think of God as "parent," an unconditionally loving presence...this certainly lends itself to caring, right? Is this your God? Sort of a loving guide who looks out for you and all creation. A God who weeps with us as well as celebrates in our joys? This God... cares, deeply.

Perhaps your God is more Christ-centered? You relate to the Divine through the figure of Jesus? All the stories of scripture around Jesus, certainly demonstrate a deep caring! Think of the way he reached across the boundaries to the Samaritan woman at the well, how he welcomed little children, how he healed countless people and had

compassion for widows, orphans, the poor, the oppressed and imprisoned. He fed people with not just food but with a Way that embraced an Infinite God of love and compassion and forgiveness... Jesus...cared. He certainly did.

Someone who stopped by the church just the other day talked about Jesus as a "Way-show-er." A Way-Show-er.

Perhaps your God is a little more of a Spirit-nature? More of a life-force that holds within all of the universes at once, including our little beings and all beings? A Spirit of love that creates all life and ecosystems, too? How might *this* perception of God...care? Perhaps it is through the intricacies of beauty in the remarkable nature of life itself.

When I watch a little spider spin a designer web...you know the kind I am talking about....a thing of absolute beauty.... I feel that deep within it all is a source of this life, God, who cannot be named nor imagined exactly, but has *got* to care. What do you think? Could we have so much intricate beauty in nature without a caring Creator?

God certainly cares in this story of Hagar and Ismael in our reading today. Remember the story? First we have Abraham and his wife Sarah...they are old and Sarah had not borne any children...she agrees to let Hagar, a servant woman conceive a child with Abraham and the result is a son, Ismael. But then Sarah does have her son, Isaac. When she sees the two playing together, she becomes jealous and does not want this first son to inherit in the same way as Isaac...so she asks Abraham to banish her servant woman, Hagar, with Ismael...out into the wilderness.

But in this touching story, when Hagar believes her son will die, God hears their cries. God shows compassion and in the height of thirst and hunger, a well of water appears in the desert. Hagar and Ismael are spared....and as the angel of God promised, they become ancestors to a great nation. And here is the amazing thing... it is from this line that Muhammad and the religion of Islam was born.

God cares. Even across religions.... It says so right here in Genesis!

In the Matthew text... we hear about a God who knows every little sparrow that falls to the ground as well as each and every hair of our head...and if you are losing your hair, imagine how much more God is weeping for you! But Jesus' said that we should not fear. A God who knows our world so intimately, cares for our well-being. Do you believe this...that God cares for our earth and the well-being of all who live within it? I believe that in some way, God longs for this.

Then Matthew starts to rant, you did not hear this part,...but he claims that Jesus is tough...that Jesus demanded our allegiance to God above even our own families...that those are favored who love God so much that they would even lose their life.... I suppose you could say this is a kind of tough-love sort of caring. Jesus came to shake things up and it is not all just sweetness and peace-talk. Of course standing up for what we believe in a firm way is a kind of *deep caring* after all!? Right?

If we did not care so much, it would be easier to just muffle along...and avert our eyes whenever we see something uncomfortable....I know I do this... Maybe really caring takes a much more radical stance!

How do *we*...care?

First, how do we care for God? One little book I found while sorting the books in our library is called *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas Kelly. This was a favorite of my mother's, in fact I have a copy at home. Hear these words about ways we might care for God:

"Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts....What is here urged are internal practices... secret habits of unceasing orientation of the depths of our being toward this Inward Light,... so that we are perpetually...in worship..."

Such practice of inward worship and listening, is no mere counsel for special religious groups... nor for monks retired in cloisters. No. This practice is the heart of all religion. It is the secret, I am persuaded, of the inner life of the Master of Galilee. He expected this secret to be freshly discovered in everyone who would be his follower...it is of no group or sect, but is a universal privilege, and it creates an amazing fellowship... a society grounded in reverence..."

Imagine having a continual inner worship as we all are grounded in reverence. What might "inner worship" look like in your life? There was an article in the paper about a man who has taken up creating bonsai trees and finds it a meditation... How would "inner worship" color the way we care? I bet it would color the way I care if I would wake up in each moment with an *inner worship....giving thanks to God.* Greeting each person from a place of "inner worship?"

Last night I listened to an interview with the actor, Martin Sheen. Did you know he not only played the President of the United States on "West Wing" but he is a devout

Catholic? He said he would only play this part if they also let him be Catholic in the show! He wanted to be President from a moral and faith perspective.

Sheen was born to a Catholic Spanish-Irish immigrant family with 9 siblings. He was taught that you serve others first. He believes God led him to experiences with Dorothy Day and the Catholic Workers, he was sent to India to film "Gandhi" and it was there that the poverty went to the center of his being and took him out of himself.

It is beautiful to hear him talk about his faith. He said that God's genius is to dwell within our own depths. Imagine "inner worship." He believes that God is love presence within our personal beings which bring about overwhelming joy...and a desire to ignite this joy in others by living compassionately...and being a vessel for service and the work of God's justice in our world. He also was arrested over 60 times for demonstrating against war and nuclear arms but he said he always demonstrated out of prayer and respect.

This kind of faith....takes self-less-ness...

Jesus was to have said in Matthew, "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life...for my sake, will find it." If our own lives become too important, or more important than anyone else's...Jesus says we will really lose what living is all about. On the other hand, if we let go of ourselves, for God's sake, then we will ironically, *find life in its fullest!* Whew! This is so great! Nearly impossible to do but I think I get it....do you?

Now you might be saying, "Who cares?"....but perhaps together we could crack open our hearts a bit more... and admit, that with God's help...we care.

Amen.