Some of you are aware of Father Richard Rohr’s ministry, Action and Contemplation, based in Albuquerque For a number of years I read his daily meditations regularly, but after a while I lost the habit. BJ Henry alluded to one them in a recent Bible study session, involving a prayer to “all the holy names of God.” That landed well with me, and I looked it up on the website. I didn’t find it initially, but in the process of looking I came across the one for September 1, 2020, which said much of what I wanted to say in today’s sermon. So, as is my custom when I find someone saying something better than I can, I’ll read it to you:

Remember what God said to Moses: “I AM Who I AM” (Exodus 3:14). *God is clearly not tied to a name*, nor does God seem to want us to tie Divinity to any one name. Which is why, in Judaism, God’s statement to Moses became God’s unspeakable and unnamable identity. Some would say that the name of God literally cannot be “spoken,” only breathed. [1] Now that was very wise, and sometimes I wish we had kept it up. This tradition alone should tell us to practice profound humility in regard to God, who gives us not a name, but *only* *pure presence*—no handle that could allow us to think we “know” who God is or have the divine as our private possession.

The Christ is always far too much for us, larger than any one era, culture, empire, or religion. Its radical inclusivity is a threat to any power structure and any form of arrogant thinking. Jesus by himself has usually been limited by the evolution of human consciousness in these first two thousand years, and held captive by culture, nationalism, and Western Christianity’s own cultural captivity to a white, bourgeois, and Eurocentric worldview. We have often missed the ways Jesus reveals himself, because “there stood among us one we did not recognize” (John 1:26). He came in mid-tone skin, from the underclass, a male body with a female soul, from an often-hated religion, and living on the very cusp between East and West. No one owns him, and no one ever will.

Jesus clearly says naming God correctly is not the priority, “Do not believe those who *say* ‘Lord, Lord’” (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46. Italics added). It is those who “do it right” that matter, he says, not those who “say it right.” Yet verbal orthodoxy has been Christianity’s preoccupation, at times even allowing us to burn people at the stake for not “saying it right.” We ended up spreading national cultures under the rubric of Jesus, instead of a universally liberating message under the name of Christ. What I call an incarnational worldview is the profound recognition of the presence of the divine in literally “every thing” and “every one.”

I would go so far as to say that*the proof that you are a mature Christian is that you can see Christ everywhere else.*Authentic God experience always expands your seeing and never constricts it. What else would be worthy of God? *In God you do not include less and less; you always see and love more and more.* And it is from this place that we lose any fear we have about entering into discussion, prayer, and friendship with people of other faith traditions.- - - - -

That, for me, is precisely what today’s readings, and the reality to which they point—Christ’s ascension into heaven—are all about, specifically this lines from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “God put [divine] power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.”

Words are precious to all of us, Our holy scripture declares, “In the beginning was the Word . . .” (capital W)!

Christ being above all things and in all things is great good news for us, even if we cannot ever hope to capture the nature of God in human language. It means that there is always something beyond our imaginations, even our hopes.

It also means that when our powers of intellect and curiosity and our search for meaning fail us, God is still here with us in the midst of struggle to bring all those powers to bear. And not only with us, but above us and beyond us.

It means that when senseless tragedies—multiple homicidal deaths in a grocery store or elementary school or invasion by a ruthless autocrat—defy our need to make sense of it all, God’s love is constant and never-failing.

That horror story in Uvalde didn’t happen for *a reason*. You’ll never convince me that it did. It is the very definition of unreasonableness. And I would never tell those poor suffering families that it is somehow in God’s plan.

What I do believe, though, is that God is with us all at the same time in our suffering whatever, whenever, and wherever that happens.

We worship and believe in the God who was caught up in senseless violence and suffered and died as a result of it, as so many others have. That God is with us in our grief and bewilderment surely as he was with those who wept at the foot of the cross and went to the tomb of their 33-year-old leader. God knows our grief and suffering, having borne it alongside us.

God was not defeated by those powers of darkness and destruction. Rather, God destroyed death with the resurrection of Christ and the promise that death does not have the final word with us.

Suffering and pain and loss are real and harsh. The love of God is infinitely more powerful.

“The Christ” by *any* name “is always far too much for us, larger than any one era, culture, empire, or religion [or, I would add, any evil act] . . . Christ’s “radical inclusivity is a threat to any power structure and any form of arrogant thinking.”

“In God you do not include less and less; you always see and love more and more.” + + +