

Hardwired

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READING Rev. Raymond Baughan: "What Is Your Theology?"

What's your theology? You try to say the world the way it means to you. You look at what you live and try to speak it; and the mystery turns into a search for language to tell how it is, and what the world has to say about what you mean. We are all theologians. We step, says Wallace Stevens, "barefoot into reality." We touch the running water and the rocks. We hurt, we laugh, we grasp and are grasped. We fall and are embraced. We find ourselves in others and others in ourselves. Broken and fragmented, we are driven toward wholeness, toward integrity, toward healing what separates and divides us from one another. Long before we hold any belief about it, we feel the presence of something sacred and meaningful. Unable to name it, we respond with metaphor, with vision, with decision, and we live as though that were the way the world is. Your theology is your commitment. In Herman Melville's words, "It is not down in any map; true places never are."

SERMON

This sermon had its earliest beginnings in a not-so-long ago conversation with a member of a congregation I served who, at the congregation's service auction, bought the opportunity to have a sermon on the topic of his choice. The various things we spoke about then - the human need for spirituality and for worship; the power and importance of story; the needs of the human spirit as we change, evolve - have kept me wondering about human beings as creatures hard wired for worship . . . or spirituality or faith or something those words point to.

For me, the reading by Raymond Baughan gets it right and feeds my curiosity. We are looking for our true places. But why? What is it about us human beings that we are on such a journey? Are we somehow hardwired for this. . . .for worship . . .or spirituality or faith or something that those words point to?

My curiosity keeps me e off on a brief meandering journey into the cognitive science of religion, linguistics, philosophy, theology, history. And into neurotheology, a unique field of scholarship and investigation that seeks to understand the relationship between the brain and theology, and more broadly between the mind and religion. (Dr. Andrew Newburg, Principles of Neurotheology)

Within and among those fields of study, arguments of all kinds are being made about why humans are and are not religious. One that caught my attention is a variation on the creation/evolution debate where fundamentalist perspectives on each side are playing out.

Those who believe the creation of humanity was a divine act claim we are hardwired for faith because we are created by god and god hardwired us that way. We are hardwired for god and over the course of our lives we search for and may find god.

Those who believe human beings are the result of evolution argue “we are religious because . . . our ancestors acquired . . . genes that expressed . . . an instinct for faith that has proved to be adaptive.” Being hardwired for religion has enabled human survival by “inclining us toward group cohesion.” We are hardwired for community and in the course of our lives we search for and may find community. (Haught, *Commonweal*, *Hard-wired for God?* 4/5/2010)

In this one area of scientific inquiry, the human need for god and the human need for community are beyond curiosity, desire, prosperity, struggle or convenience. These needs are part of what it is that makes us human. No matter the side of the creation/evolution argument – human beings are hard wired to reach for something greater than the individual self.

John Dominic Crossan is a scholar of the historical Jesus and early Christianity who has weighed in on this notion of humanity’s hardwiring. We are, Crossan writes, hard wired for religion just as we are for language but not for “God” any more than for “English.” We are not “pre-programmed for any specific religion or any specific language.” We are hardwired to search for meaning, to make some response to the mystery that surrounds us. That search need not begin with “god”. That is but one - and only one - perfectly valid name for the mystery. (On Faith blog, 12/6/06)

Now I’m inclined to accept this notion of hardwiring and to say yes to all three purposes for it: a connection to god, a preference for community, a search for meaning. I say yes to all of them, apart from any argument claiming the truth of one over another. I say yes to all of them because I believe we are hardwired for something more, for something larger, beyond the individual self and that it inspires us to seek god, community, meaning.

I say we are hardwired for wholeness.

Listen again to these words from the Raymond Baughan quote:

“Broken and fragmented, we are driven toward wholeness, toward integrity, toward healing what separates and divides us from one another. Long before we hold any belief about it, we feel the presence of something sacred and meaningful.”

Among our sources of faith is reliance on direct human experience of that transcending mystery and wonder There is one experience in my life I can now describe as having traveled that hardwired pathway calling human beings toward wholeness. It happened in the Blue Ridge Mountains in my home state of Virginia at a place called Thunder Ridge, where a stone overlook atop the ridge looks west.

I was standing on Thunder Ridge. It was cold, incredibly and loudly windy, with a clear sky. From the overlook the Shenandoah Valley spreads wide before me and across it the Appalachian Mountain Range is visible. As I stood there on the ridge, it seemed the only sound was the wind, that no other sound was even possible. As I stood there, trying to brace myself against the wind, I felt a change - from the wind pushing on me, being a sound outside me to the wind being within, being the breath in me. The wind on the ridge and my breathing became one. And I became rooted to the small patch of earth on which I stood. My feet were

of the earth - not on it but of it. Whatever pulse of life there was on the ridge was soon enough beating inside me. It was as complete an experience of connection to this fragile and resilient blue planet as I can imagine. The implications and consequences of those moments on Thunder Ridge shape my theological journey and my understanding of my place in the world to this day. Those moments shape my search for the holy, for community, for meaning. . . for wholeness.

It's been more than 35 years since my experience on Thunder Ridge. Try as I might and even now, I have yet to find words that do it justice, convey the intensity of those few moments. Over the years as I have re-lived it, the heart of what happened is unchanged. "Broken and fragmented, I am driven toward wholeness, toward integrity, toward healing what separates and divides us . . . Long before I held any belief about it, I felt the presence of something sacred and meaningful." This is how it was for me that day.

It is a hard thing, this being hardwired for wholeness. It means there is something incomplete in us. There is room in us. Some might say emptiness. Some might say a possibility – a possibility that allows us to "feel the presence of something sacred and meaningful."

It is a hard thing being hardwired for wholeness. There are no guarantees of outcome. Having this room in us for something more can lead us in many directions – away from the spirit of life, away from community, away from meaning, into addictions, into dangers, into a seemingly endless search. There are no guarantees. Only the drive toward wholeness.

Here we are – humans hardwired for a search for wholeness. Some of us are intentionally following our own path, already on our own journey, our own quest. Others are looking for direction. Some of us are taking a break, finding rest here for a time. Some are struggling with an insight or question, with a hard blow dealt by hard times, by tragedy, by loss. Some of us are here with a spirit that smiles for we have recently felt the presence of the sacred. Here we are with a wealth of traditions and stories and images and songs, a wealth of sources offered to us with the invitation to carefully, respectfully learn from them as we go about the tasks of making our own life's meanings.

Here we are. Hardwired for wholeness. Held in community. The rest is up to us. What we bring. What we give. What we share. What we make. Let it be this way among us:

Try to say the world the way it means to you. Look at what you live and try to speak it. Turn the mystery into a search for language to tell how it is, and what the world has to say about what you mean. . . Step . . . "barefoot into reality." Touch the running water and the rocks. Hurt. Laugh. Grasp and be grasped. Fall and be embraced. Find yourself in others and others in you. As broken and fragmented as we are, we are driven toward wholeness . . . Unable to name it, we respond with metaphor, with vision, with decision, **and we live as though this is the way the world is.** . . .