

David Good Quotes and Passages:

*From the sermon "The Making of Relatives," September 30, 2001*

Consider the Book of Ruth. In it, we find Ruth and Naomi, who were from two different tribes, two different cultures, two different nations. Their respective nations didn't like each other very much; at times, they had been at war with one another. It is out of that background that we find the beautiful words that Ruth said to Naomi:

"Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if this were the final chapter in all the warring tribes of the earth? We simply cannot imagine, and we must never underestimate what wonderfully healing words those are. "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

*From the sermon "Love and Hope: The Twin Towers of the Human Spirit," September 16, 2001*

We, in all of our religious traditions, need to venture out to the boundaries of our faith, for it is only at those boundaries that we will be able to join hands with people of other traditions. I see that this is happening in the collective unconscious of the human family. We're tired of dwelling on all the things that divide us; we want to seek out those things that bind us together.

Are we strong enough in our Christian faith that we can venture out to the boundaries of our faith and join hands with our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions?

Or, to put it another way, are we deep enough in our own faith that we can go down below the ground water of our own particular tradition, way down to the spiritual aquifers that run beneath all the religions of this earth?

*From the sermon "Christ in Africa: A Theology of Accompaniment," August 14, 1988*

(After telling the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, thrown into a fiery furnace for their defiance of King Nebuchadnezzar, in the Book of Daniel, chapter 3, verses 1-27)

We have to think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and how they accompanied each other in their defiance of the state. There is strength in numbers. There is strength in company. "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." We all need the support we receive from our families and friends. And we gather in communities of faith not to find some escape from the world but to be of moral support to one another, there to encourage each other in our mutual struggles.

But also, we must remember that other most important part of the story: that fourth person there inside that furnace who to King Nebuchadnezzar looked like an angel. Now, we all know that angels come in many different forms, in many different shapes and sizes, and we remember how the Bible urges us “to show hospitality to strangers for we never know when we are entertaining angels unawares.”

What I would like to suggest is we can sometimes be that fourth person there inside the fiery furnace. That is what accompaniment means. We never know when or where what we say or what we do or who we are may have a dramatic, angelic effect upon someone else.

We have all spent some time in that fiery furnace, and we all give thanks for specific people and groups who have been for us as angels, examples for us of the fourth person in the furnace.

*From the sermon “A Bible Story I Used to Love,” March 15, 2009*

(After telling the story of Caleb and the conquest of Canaan)

Stories have a way of becoming mythology and mythology has a way of becoming a part of one's own narrative. And I have seen the damage that the narrative of the conquest of Canaan has done to those who live in the present day land of Canaan...the damage done not only to those who are occupied but also the damage done to the occupier as well, for ultimately the occupation is terrible for everyone, for even as it imprisons the people of Palestine, it also dehumanizes those in a position of power.

How I wish that this story about Caleb had a different sort of ending. How I wish that this story had created a very different mythology and a very different narrative. How I wish Caleb had quieted the people of Israel and said something like this:

I have seen the land of promise and it is very promising indeed. I have seen the snow on Mount Hermon and I have floated upside down in the Dead Sea, and I have tasted the fish in the Sea of Galilee and I have stretched out beneath the beautiful branches of an olive tree.

But what you have heard from the others is not true. The tribes that live in that land - they are not sub-human, they are not less than human species that “devours their inhabitants” as you have been told. They are not giants that made me feel like a grasshopper by comparison. They're just ordinary people, just like you and me, wanting to provide for their children. They are proud of their heritage, and I want you to know that I met with them and they extended unbelievable hospitality, as nomadic Bedouins are famous for doing. Even though they lived in tents, these Bedouins invited me inside and we sat down on their long and beautifully woven rugs, and they shared with me some tea and other refreshments, and I shared with them how we had all been slaves in the land of Egypt, how we were tired from traveling for all these many years, and that we were hoping to find a new home for ourselves on this side of the Jordan River.

They smiled, and they said, Salaam, Aleikum - may the peace of God be upon you. The Land of Canaan is indeed the Land of Promise, they said, and it is large enough and rich enough for all of us to share. Bring your families, your tribes, your customs and let's make the Holy Land a place that we can all be proud of.

And so Caleb went back to the Israelites to share his report, and he said, "There will be challenges to be sure. But based upon what I have seen, I have no doubt that we can all live in peace and prosperity with one another. "Let us go up at once and live together in the Land of Promise." It is not the Promised Land, but the Land of Promise. It is not land or real estate that God has given exclusively to us, but it is indeed a land of tremendous promise. We are God's chosen people, to be sure, but so are the Canaanites and the Hittites and all the other tribes that belong to the human family. We are all God's chosen people, for we are all God's children, and the spirit that God has given us is a good and noble spirit, and there is nothing we cannot do. We can overcome our tribalism. We can learn to live in peace with one another and we can make this Land of Promise the place that God created it to be, a beacon of hope for all humanity.

*From the sermon "A Few of My Favorite Churches," May 22, 2011*

I remember the story of a teacher who went to an island off the coast of Maine. With his young students, he decided to start with where they were. He asked all who had seen the Atlantic Ocean to please raise their hands. Not a single hand went up.

Here were children of lobster boatmen who had made their living from the Atlantic Ocean. No doubt, these children had gone swimming in the ocean, sailed their boats in the ocean, skipped rocks across the waves of the ocean, lived and breathed the mist from the ocean, and, yet, it never occurred to them that this was the Atlantic Ocean. No doubt they called it by some other name.

So it is with regard to our experiences of God. The experience of God, a religious experience is not so much something we look for but rather something we name. Think of the lump in your throat when you were moved by something profound. Think of the tear in your eye when you were touched by someone else's sorrow. Think of the shiver down your spine when you saw something beautiful...Think of the anger, the righteous indignation you felt when you saw something wrong and felt that burning desire to go and do something about it. Those who think of themselves as being "atheists" or "agnostics" may not be so much "disbelievers" as they are not very good "namers," for I would suspect that every day we've all had some kind of "religious experience."

We do not seek the Atlantic; we explore it. And so it is with our experiences of God.