

Easter 5 Year A 2011

I was driving here to church yesterday morning when I spotted the sign at the Roseburg high school announcing the word for the week. Esoteric..... One thing led to another and I found myself taking a pilgrimage down a whole list of words as I reflected on the readings for this morning. I ask you to go along with me on this word journey.

Synonyms for the Roseburg High School word of the week Esoteric; obscure, mysterious, abstruse, impenetrable, cryptic, and arcane. And then I looked up the synonyms for the synonyms. The synonyms for obscure; difficult to understand, incomprehensible, unclear, vague, ambiguous, doubtful, murky, and unintelligible. Synonyms for mysterious; strange, unexplained, inexplicable, unsolved, odd, puzzling, mystifying, and baffling. Synonyms for abstruse, and that's a word you don't hear too often; back to obscure, and mysterious, perplexing, puzzling, complex, profound, and rarefied. Synonyms for impenetrable; dense, unfathomable, and hidden. Synonyms for cryptic; secret and then back to mysterious, hidden, obscure, and puzzling. Synonyms for arcane; back to mysterious, secret, hidden, and unfathomable, and then full circle to the Roseburg High School word I started with esoteric.

Perhaps a good word or synonym for our God is esoteric. The readings this morning, the stoning of

Stephen; Stephen had a vision of the heavens and although he knew his life hung by a thread he dared to speak of this vision.....esoteric. He died a painful death and yet he was able to pray and forgive the sins of those who killed him.....esoteric. The psalmist says "In you, O lord, have I taken refuge; ... Into your hands I commend my spirit."esoteric. From the first letter of Peter, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." ...esoteric. From the Gospel of John Jesus tells his disciples, "Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." ...esoteric. All of these truths deep and hidden from the foundation of the world, deep and hidden in the life of God, mysterious and secret, they defy our simple understanding and explanation...esoteric.

Our faith is mystifying, our faith is inexplicable, unexplainable, profound, complex, and yes even sometimes vague, sometimes unclear, sometimes ambiguous, murky, and unintelligible. Our God is often beyond our comprehension. When Thomas responds to Jesus saying, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" he didn't get an easy

answer... he got an esoteric answer. An answer that required the offering of his life.

Christians across the centuries have been tempted to offer easy answers that explain what God is up to. We've participated in wars that kill people of other faiths. We've practiced racism and classism. We've attempted to predict that the world will end and that we know what God is up to. But how could we? How could we offer easy answers to anything about God? Jesus gives no easy answers. I think he wants to keep pushing us to understand that God is far greater than we can possibly imagine. God may even be esoteric. God is deep and hidden, often strange and unexplained.

We are created by this awesome, mysterious, incomprehensible, unfathomable, and esoteric. This is the God that Jesus calls us to believe in. He says, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Recently the etymology of the word believe was explained to me by a professor and writer of church history. She said that believing is not about your opinion but about the direction of your heart. Believing is about what you give your heart to. When Jesus says Believe in God, Believe also in me," he's not asking for an opinion but he's asking for the direction of your heart. Put your heart in God's direction. Put your heart in my direction. When Thomas asks to know the way to where he was going Jesus answers by revealing a journey, by revealing

the way. He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Believing is a journey of turning our hearts in God's direction.

I want to close with a note to God written in the journals of Henri Nouwen. Let us pray.

Dear God, though I experience many ups and downs in my emotions and often feel great shifts and changes in my inner life, you remain the same. Your sameness is not the sameness of a rock, but the sameness of a faithful lover. Out of your love I came to life; by your love I am sustained, and to your love I am always called back. There are days of sadness and days of joy; there are feelings of guilt and feelings of gratitude; there are moments of failure and moments of success; but all of them are embraced by your unwavering love. Amen.