

The idea of God is very pleasant for me. I suppose I am fortunate, privileged even, in that regard. I grew up amid and have remained among people who have sought to make God accessible and approachable.

Inside my head and heart and mind, are picturesque images.

The Shepherd God spreads a banquet for me on a red-checkered blanket. Water, in crystal goblets of course, is the clearest blue and SO refreshing. And the deviled eggs are amazing. And cool grass brushes the back of my legs. The sun is bright and warm, and yet comfortable. In God's presence, anxiety and stress are at a distance, and even my enemies seem content.

Manna falls from the sky, almost like snow flurries. I'm not sure who's giggling more, the God who produces these flakes or the happy souls that procure them.

Sometimes, God walks with me in a garden. We're old friends. We find rest and laughter and joy in one another, and we remark of the beauty and stillness we experience.

Sometimes, God is messy, but cozy. I'm invited into a den, and my host clears away clutter – a newspaper, last night's dinner plate, an old utility bill, a stray sock, and a chewed-up dog toy – clutter is swept away in a clearing motion. And an old, beat up sofa cushion draws me in.

Sometimes, with the flick of the wrist, or the snap of a finger, this God conjures up breathtaking vistas of the ocean, or summons eclectic flowers, or sends a gentle wind or rain. Sometimes, this God transcends

the stubbornness of material limitations: food, clothing, shelter, company are all provided with ease.

Sometimes, this powerful, mysterious, mighty God of ours is something SO different. This God listens to me in my despair and distress, and doesn't try to fix things, or tell me why I shouldn't worry, but instead, just offers a shoulder, and a sense of empathy. Sometimes, this God just says, "I know, I'm sad, too, and I'm sorry, but I'm right here. And I'll sit with you and be present for a while."

Sometimes this God tells me, "Sure, I'm a complex being, but I am not always as complicated as you make me out to be!"

And sometimes, I sit in a room, and I look around at different people. People from every imaginable place and time, representing every imaginable categorization humanity has decided to construct. And God has this way of noticing every single one of us, being attuned, making us feel special, and loved, and valued. And everybody, everybody seems to believe they are enough, and that they have enough of God's presence and attention.

This God of mine, this God of yours, this God of ours, is a wonderful God. But if this God of ours is to be experienced – really, truly, authentically experienced – this God of ours must expand beyond the sealed-off corridors of our hearts and minds and become incarnate in the world.

John's gospel tells us that such a thing has happened. Jesus, the incarnated Word, manifests and marshals the power of the One who throws banquets, drops bread from the sky, creates the heavens and earth, and gifts value and dignity to all created beings. The spirit and

energy of God are present and palpable in one who also knows the longings of human existence.

In today's text, and last week's, too, and I am assuming for a few more weeks to come (the lectionary is throwing a whole slew of feeding miracles and bread of life metaphors at us!), the crowds around Jesus are missing the forest for the miracle. They're chasing today's supper instead of recognizing the opportunity for a lifetime of feasting.

They want more of Jesus because they have full bellies. And I think in some way, probably a lot like me, they are waiting for the God of their hearts and minds to do all the work for them. They want manna to fall from the sky, but they believe God has to be the only one shaking the rain stick.

"Tell us, Jesus," they say, "What are the kind of things we need to do to perform the works of God?" Just gives us the rules, and we'll comply, so that God will get about doing the work of justice and healing.

Jesus answers them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

This is the work of God. That you believe the God of your hearts and minds can be expressed in humanity. Jesus wants us to recognize that his power and possibilities emanate from the presence of God. And that very same presence can empower each of us in a similar manner.

The Word, the energy, the love, the umph of God became personified in the life of Jesus. And the Word can and does come to life in each of us as well.

I cannot walk on water, even with skis. And even with an industrial kitchen and training, and lots of helping hands, I would struggle mightily to feed the multitudes with any sense of fulfillment.

But I can make a concerted effort to channel an approachable God, to welcome that God into fellowship, especially in the middle of stormy seas. And I can share some of my bread, even take a turn at baking a loaf or two. And with the little or lot I have to share, I can recognize that such sharing, when accompanied with a loving spirit, and desire to cultivate hospitality, can feed others in lasting ways.

I want to participate in activities that help each of us visualize and imagine the possibilities of our approachable God. We need to engage in difficult and ongoing dialogue: about privilege, about racism, about poverty, about theology, about the lure of economics and greed. We need to bring our approachable, accepting, creative God into these spaces. And then, most importantly, then, we need to incarnate God into the world through consistent and heart-felt acts of hospitality and acceptance. Read about the earliest Jesus-followers in Acts 2. That's what they were doing!

We can't be content to believe in the hypothetical and idealized stories of manna. We can't be passive in waiting for our approachable God to provide manna to those in need. We've got to realize that God, in the story of Jesus, has invited us to a new call: We are equipped to be manna-makers by incarnating God's spirit and power in our own lives.

How do we feed the world? How do we heal the world? How do we make it more just and equitable? How do we make the world reflect the love of God?

Think about the kind of friend God has been to you, or at least you imagine God would be. Be that kind of friend to others. Think about the feeling of fulfilment and peace you might have in banqueting with God. Be a host to others. Think about the unequivocal acceptance God offers you in any state of being or mind? God created you, and therefore God loves you when you are grumpy, or sad, or happy, or feeling vulnerable, or ashamed, or confused, or blah. I think equity and justice begin with acknowledging a humanity and value that transcends emotion.

Finally, God's love isn't a collection of sacred texts and traditions. It isn't clinical. God's love is revealed in the continuous cycle of God's story. Texts and traditions give us a push, but it's our heart and spirit that bring life to God's love in our communities.

In the weeks to come, we'll read stories of Jesus' amazing miracles. But don't just come for the bread today. Remember that Jesus invites you into these events, because Jesus sees every person's capacity to the incarnated Word in the world.

Friends, may it be so, and may it be soon! Amen!