

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK

Pastor John Robinson advised the departing Pilgrims in 1620, “God hath yet more truth and light to break forth from His holy Word.”

For the past fifty years I have preached on that Word almost every Sunday. I have walked through each week with a passage from that Holy Word in the back of my mind. I have puzzled over: what new light would God shed on these words that my congregation needs to hear? Occasionally I have received new insight. Sometimes I have concluded that the traditional way of interpreting a Scripture is not the right one, or perhaps not the most helpful; or sometimes my new insight is simply a different way of looking at the Scripture which is just as good as the traditional way.

I invite you to ***take another look***. Take off the blinders of tradition. Join me in listening to some familiar Bible passages and hearing a fresh message.

BURIED TREASURE

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:44-46

When we hear these words we usually think that the buried treasure and the pearl of great price represent the kingdom of God, or a relationship with God, or salvation. We are the one who has discovered this buried treasure; we are the pearl merchant. The point is the value of this treasure, and the commitment it calls forth from us. We need to be prepared to give up everything else, to gain and possess this greatest of all treasures. It is about commitment - total commitment.

I have no problem with that interpretation, but there is another way to look at these parables, let's

take another look

What if YOU are the buried treasure. What if YOU are the pearl of great price! Does this sound strange? Compare these parables to those found in Luke chapter 15. God is like a shepherd with a hundred sheep. When one is lost, he leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one that is lost. God is like a woman with ten coins. When she loses one, she turns the house upside down until she finds it. God is like a father with two sons; when one leaves home with his share of the inheritance, and finally returns, the father welcomes him home with joy. In all of those parables, God is the seeker, and we are the lost that needs to be found. So why

shouldn't we interpret these parables in Matthew 13 in the same light? They speak of how much God cares for us; how much God seeks us; and how great is God's joy when we are found.

In the Luke parables the over-riding theme is joy. *Rejoice with me* is repeated in each parable. So the added element in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost son is the ninety-nine and the older brother. They represent the religious people who don't appear all that joyful about the people coming to Jesus. Joy is also mentioned in the parable of buried treasure, although there is no mention of a group that lacks sufficient joy. So there are differences.

Another way to look at these Matthew parables is the concept of *worth*. In common usage, if someone speaks of how much somebody is *worth* they express it in dollars. A person's property, investments, and other assets of financial value, add up to what a person is worth. Some of us aren't worth very much in these terms. But what are you worth to God? Jesus points to the birds, who have no assets stored in barns, and says "Are you not of more value than they?" In God's eyes you are a priceless pearl, a buried treasure.

There's nothing wrong with the traditional interpretation of this Scripture; but I like this other interpretation better.

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Matthew 25:14-30

A Talent in bible times was first of all a measurement of weight. To aid in commerce, the value of a commodity or of labor was measured by the weight in a precious metal, such as gold, silver or copper. So a measurement of weight became a measurement of monetary value - just like the English pound. A monetary unit is the meaning of *talent* in this parable.

The word *talent* in English has another meaning, which can easily distract us when interpreting this parable. My dictionary, after giving weight and money as its first definition, goes on:

- talent** . . . 2. Any natural ability or power, natural endowment;
3. A special superior ability in an art, mechanics, learning, etc.¹

It is easy to think of our natural abilities as gifts from God, which we are to use to the glory of God.

(Some folks see this parable as a Biblical endorsement of capitalism, which is to miss the point altogether).

I have problems with our common interpretation. Our use of our abilities depends so much on connections or chance. For every great artist who has been “discovered” and “promoted,” there have been scores of others, undiscovered through no fault of their own, who had to find another way to make a living. Think of all the natural abilities of persons born into slavery, who could have discovered cures for diseases, or created amazing

¹*Webster's New World dictionary of the American Language: College Edition.* Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962; p. 1486.

art, but who only got to cultivate their ability to pick cotton? What about women who were not given the opportunity to develop their natural abilities because a job was not considered “women’s work.”

And if we do not use our natural abilities - through no fault of our own - are we guilty of failure and liable for punishment?

Let’s take another look.

What are the most precious gifts that God entrusts to us? Words like *grace*, *forgiveness* and *love* come to my mind first. These three overlapping terms are the precious gift - the *talent* - that God has entrusted to us. Other terms may come to mind: peace, joy, salvation, eternal life! They all speak of gifts that are offered to all. What do we do with these gifts?

The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35) teaches us that mercy received is to be mercy lived in our relationships with others.

The phrase “pay it forward,” popularized by a movie of that name in 2000, promotes the idea that, rather than paying back evil for evil, we can pay forward acts of kindness. We can receive from someone something we haven’t earned or deserved, and in turn give a gift of value to someone else.

Oscar Hammerstein has a girl sixteen going on seventeen in *The Sound of Music*, sing

The love in your heart wasn’t put there to stay,
Love isn’t love ‘till you give it away.

The love that God has given to us - the precious talent - isn’t love until we

have invested it in the world - given it away.

The parable of the talents is about grace. It is about the most precious gift of all time. It is about the love of God, unmerited, unearned, undeserved, given freely through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Grace isn't given to us to hoard - to bury in the ground. Grace is given to us to be lived.

I don't know why in the parable different persons are given different numbers of talents. God's gift of grace is infinite beyond measure given freely to all. Perhaps the parable is pointing to the degree to which we are open to receiving the grace of God. If we can't share it, we really haven't gotten it.

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

Genesis 22:1-19

*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love,
and go to the land of Moriah,
and offer him there as a burnt offering
on one of the mountains that I shall show you.*

Genesis 22:2

This story gives us modern people a lot of problems: cruelty, murder, child abuse! What kind of God would do that?

The usual explanation is that God was testing Abraham, to see how much he loved God. This is helpful, but not totally. Other questions arise in our minds: If God knows everything, why did he have to administer this test? Why would a loving God suggest that a person show devotion by murdering a child?

An other, Christian explanation, is that this points to the death of God's only-begotten son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. Out of love for all of humanity (really, all of Creation), God comes to us as the Christ and willingly dies to show the depth of God's love.

These two explanations may help; but the story is still troubling.

Let's take another look

For starters, I am not a literalist. This request of God to Abraham is out of character with everything else I read about God in the Bible. I believe that Abraham *thought* that God wanted him to sacrifice his son. Perhaps it came to him in a vision or a dream, and he *thought* it came from God. After all, this is the way all the other gods of all the peoples of the

world acted. Abraham had not yet learned that this God was different.

Human sacrifice constituted part of the religious practice of all the nations around Abraham. It was practiced by the Greeks and Romans. It was practiced in China, India, Africa, and the islands of the Pacific. The Aztecs slaughtered tens of thousands of sacrificial victims at a time. This was common religious practice. Everyone was doing it. Why should the God of Abraham be different?

How could people have done that? We are appalled! The problem is that we are modern twenty-first century people and we think like modern twenty-first century people. We don't understand how people in other times and places thought.

Charles Eastman, in *Indian Boyhood*, described his life in a Dakota Indian village. When he was eight years old, his grandmother told him, "You must give up one of your belongings - whichever is dearest to you - for this is to be a sacrificial offering." She explained, "it is the Mystery of Mysteries, who controls all things, to whom you will make your first offering. By this act you will ask him to grant to you what he has granted to few men. I know you wish to be a great warrior and hunter." She explained that he must sacrifice Ohika, the dog that was his faithful companion and pet. The boy prepared Ohika as a brave facing death, applying red and black paint, and attaching red cloth and squirrel tails, and turned him over for sacrifice.²

This has been the way of almost all the cultures of the world. But the Abrahamic religions are different. Yes, we are called to make sacrifices - but it is to give up something for a greater good.

²Charles A. Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, pp. 87-96 (New York: McClure, Phillips & Company, 1902; reprint, Dover Publications, 1971).

The Psalmist wrote:

*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit,
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Psalm 51:17

To sacrifice our pride - our hubris - is to open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Micah had people asking:

*Shall I give my firstborn for my transgressions;
the fruit of my body for the sins of my soul?*

To which he replied:

*God has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice
and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Micah 6:7-8

This is the sacrifice God wants.

Jesus said,

*If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
For those who want to save their life will lose it;
and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,
will save it.*

Matthew 16:24-25

Yes, there will be sacrifice, and suffering, and death. But it will be for a reason. We do not please God by making ourselves miserable; we do please God by living for God in the world.

The story of the sacrifice of Isaac marks a revolution in the thinking of the human race. God does not rejoice in our suffering. God rejoices when we walk in the way God has shown us.

Do you see why, the only way I can reconcile this story with what I know about God, is to say that Abraham *thought* God wanted him to sacrifice his son? Sometimes *we* may think God wants us to do something. Are we *sure*? Is it consistent with what we know about God from Scripture and our personal experience of God? We need to discern the will of God through prayer, Scripture and keeping connected with the faith community. We don't want to make a mistake like Abraham almost did.

Does the sacrifice of Isaac have any other meaning in our world today?

Wilfred Owen, a British poet and soldier who died in the last week of World War I, had written poems on his wartime experiences. In the following poem he reflected on the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac. He compared the "old men" who governed the countries of Europe with Abraham, and the young men sent to the trenches with Isaac.

The Parable of the Old Man and the Young

*So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and the knife.*

*And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! An angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not your hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.³*

Perhaps this is the meaning of the sacrifice of Isaac for today.

³Wilfred Owen, "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young."

OUR FATHER

Pray in this way, "Our Father . . . "
Matthew 5:7

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, saying, "Our Father . . ." These words are comforting to some, troublesome to others.

Today we look upon the title *Father* for God as indication that God is (1) close to us, as close as a family member; (2) personal, not an abstraction; and (3) someone who cares for us and protects us. This is expressed in Psalm 103:

*As a father has compassion on his children
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*
Psalm 103:13

The title *Father* is an obstacle to a close relationship with God for some, whose earthly fathers were manipulative, sadistic, remote, or simply absent. Such persons will inevitably associate the attributes of their earthly fathers to the Father God, and will not be able to trust that God.

Then there is the problem of gender. Why is God always described as male? We read in Genesis 1:27:

*So God created humankind in his image;
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

Or, as the passage is rephrased in inclusive language:

Humankind was created as God's reflection;

*in the divine image God created them;
female and male God made them.*

Humankind - male and female - bears the image of God. It is inaccurate to describe God in exclusively male language. God is Spirit, cannot be confined by any one conceptions of God, and is beyond gender.

So how do we speak of God in a way that is intimate and personal, but refrain from the use of gender? That is the dilemma.

Let's take another look

What do the scriptures intend to convey to us when they call God *Father*? Let me warn you in advance, this is not going to provide a solution to our contemporary problem of ascribing gender to God. This is an attempt to look at the words *Our Father* in a totally different light.

The use of the word *Father* for God is rare in the Old Testament. I count only 15 verses in which God is called *Father* or described as being like a father in the Old Testament. God is much more often referred to as *God (el, Elohim)*, *LORD* (in capitals, *Yahweh*), *Lord (Adonai, baal)*, *God Almighty (El Shaddai)*, *God Most High (El Elyon)*, and *The Everlasting God (El Olam)*. In seven of the fifteen cases where God is called *Father*, God is the father of the nation of Israel. For example,

*For I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

Jeremiah 31:9d

When we read some of these passages we may think of God as a father of all nations, which is a valid interpretation, but I do not think that was how the Israelites heard it.

Five of the Old Testament verses that speak of God as Father, speak specifically of the King as the Son. In 2 Samuel 7 God made a covenant with David. God promised that David would have a son to inherit his throne. God declared:

*I will be a father to him
and he shall be a son to me.*
2 Samuel 7:14a

furthermore,

your throne shall be established forever.
2 Samuel 7:16b

This covenant establishes the plot for much of the rest of the Bible. It is the foundation of the Messianic expectation of the Jewish people in the days of Jesus. The term *Father* is used of God in explaining the intimate relationship with the King/Messiah, who is the Son.

The few remaining references to God as Father in the Old Testament include the analogy mentioned at the beginning of this essay from Psalm 103, and,

Father of orphans and protector of widows
Psalm 68:5a

*You are our Father,
we are the clay and you are the potter,
we are all the work of your hand*
Isaiah 64:8

The reference in Isaiah 9:6 to *Everlasting Father* is a reference to the King

or coming Messiah, not God.

In contrast to the fifteen verses in the Old Testament where God is called *Father*, the New Testament contains 230 verses in which God is called Father, 98 of these are in the gospel of John. That's right, 40% of the references to God as *Father* in the Bible are in one book. Much of this gospel is preoccupied with explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son.

The early church - and that includes the *Gospel according to John* - had a theological problem to solve. If there is only one God, who is Jesus Christ? They first turned to the messianic language of Father and Son. Jesus, the Messiah, is the Son of God - the *only-begotten Son*. Then they turned to the word *Word (logos)* (John 1:1-18), and used this in parallel to the word *Wisdom (Sophia)* (Proverbs 28:22-31), to place the Son/Word/Wisdom as co-creator with God from the beginning of time. Later generations would further develop the doctrine of the trinity. The *Gospel of John* uses Father-Son language to explain the identity of Jesus, but fills those term with deeper meaning.

In John's gospel, the religious authorities were scandalized by Jesus' language:

For this reason the Jewish authorities were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

John 5:10

He used such language as:

The Father and I are one.

John 10:30

Of the 98 verses in John that speak of God as Father, 70 are describing the relationship of Father to Son, in 19 others Jesus speaks of "My father," in 6 Jesus is addressing God as Father in prayer, and 3 speak of God simply as "the Father." Nowhere in John do we find "our Father" or "your Father."

The other three gospels call God *Father* a total of 58 times; 40 of these are in the *Gospel according to Matthew*. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks to the crowd about "your Father" or "our Father" 14 times; otherwise, in these three gospels Jesus speaks of "my Father" 21 times.

The letters of Paul often begin with a double use of the term Father; for example:

*Grace to you and peace
from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation.
2 Corinthians 1:2-3*

Paul, in several places, speaks of us - in particular gentiles - as being children of God by adoption:

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.
For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,
but you have received a Spirit of adoption.
When we cry 'Abba! Father!'
It is the very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit
that we are children of God;*

*and if children, then heirs,
 heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ;
 if in fact we suffer with him,
 so that we may also be glorified with him.*

Romans 8:14-17

The following table details the uses of the word *Father* in the New Testament:

books	“our Father” or “your Father”	“the Father”	“my [Jesus’] Father”	Father of the Son or of Jesus	“Father” in prayer of Jesus	total
Mt, Mk, Lk	24	0	21	4	9	58
John	0	3	19	70	6	98
Paul	20	12	0	10	0	42
general letters	0	15	0	6	0	21
Acts, Heb, Rev	2	2	3	4	0	11
Total	46	32	43	94	15	230

So what is the intent of the New Testament writers when they call God *Father*? There are differences among the authors. But the preponderance is to use the Father-Son language of the messianic promise. In most cases God is called *Father* to define the relationship with Jesus Christ, the *Son*. The phrases “your Father” and “our Father” are found mostly in the Sermon on the Mount and the letters of Paul.

So if Jesus, who is THE Son, teaches us to pray “Our Father,” what does that mean? Is Jesus suggesting that we are somehow co-participants with Jesus in his messianic ministry? As Paul says, “joint heirs with Christ.” The calling of Christ, is it ours also?

*To bring good news to the poor . . .
To proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind.
To let the oppressed go free.
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*
Luke 4:18-19

Calling God *Father* is not about having a comfortable feeling with a father-like deity. It's about participating in the relationship between the sovereign God and the Messiah. So when we pray “Our Father . . .” we are claiming to be Christians - little christs - participating with Christ in ministry, suffering and glory.

BORN AGAIN

*No one can see the kingdom of God
without being born again.*

John 3:3

The master of ceremonies at the outdoor Gospel Concert said, “Everyone saved on a Monday, raise your hands.” A few people raised their hands uttering “Praise the Lord!” or other exclamations. Then he went through the other days of the week, and received other expressions of thanks to God. I didn’t raise my hand. After some reflection I concluded I was saved on a Friday, when Jesus Christ died on the Cross for my sins.

But that’s not what the speaker meant. By being *saved* he was referring to the born-again experience - an emotional experience of commitment and surrender to the grace of God. He had in mind a “Damascus Road” experience like the one that turned around the life of Paul of Tarsus. “Born again” is a phrase used for a conversion experience that turns us to God.

I did have a foundational religious experience. Although I can remember it as if it were yesterday, I can’t recall the day or month. And it wasn’t the conventional “Accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior” event. It was, rather, a surrender to the words of Jesus: “Seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness.” That act of surrender on my part, to trust in God’s righteousness, not my own, has shaped my life and has given me peace.

Not everyone can remember a time or event when this new birth came. Dag Hammarskjöld reflected in 1961,

I don’t know Who - or what - put the question. I don’t know

when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone - or Something - and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.⁴

However, the phrase “born again” is commonly used to describe an identifiable emotional experience of a certain form. If faith has not come to us in that specific way, we may question our faith, or else question the integrity of those who say we must be born again.

Lets take another look

The phrase “born again” is found in the Bible only in the third chapter of the Gospel according to John. Is there anything similar to it in the other gospels?

Yes, there is. I'll print them in parallel columns so we can compare. I'll use the King James Version, the version that has shaped our history:

John 3:3

Matthew 18:3

Verily, verily I say unto thee
Except a man be born again

he cannot see
the kingdom of God

Verily I say unto you.
Except ye be converted, and
become as little children,
ye shall not enter
the kingdom of heaven

The other gospels (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17) record a similar saying. In common usage, these scriptures have been given different applications. John is seen as calling us to an about face in life. Matthew is interpreted as

⁴Dag Mammarskjöld, *Markings*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 205.

calling us to child like virtues, such as humility, innocence and wonder. If we attempt to interpret these verses as two versions of the same saying, what do we get?

When you are born, what happens next? You become a little child, that is, a baby. And so it follows, if we are born as spiritual persons, we become spiritual children.

What does it mean to be a small child? It is to be entirely dependent on others. It means that - step by step - we will be learning to live as human beings. When we receive a spiritual rebirth we enter a state of dependence on God. To be born again - to be a child of the Spirit - is to surrender. The kingdom of God - Salvation - eternal life - whatever you choose to call it - it is not *achieved*, it can only be *received*. As a newborn baby is dependent on others for food, for warmth, for protection, and for love, so are we dependent on God for our lives, our joy, and our meaning. If we ever outgrow that dependence, we are in trouble. We have lost that which we thought we had. Even as we learn - step by step - how to live as citizens of the kingdom - it is never our achievement. We need to go back to the nursery, basking in the love of our doting parent-God.

So are you born again?

In humility, only by the grace of God, may we be born again and again and again.

JESUS THE ONLY WAY

*I am the way and the truth and the life,
No one comes the Father except through me.*

John 14:6

Mary Lyon wrote in 1843:

I approached nearer and nearer to the awful brink of the bottomless pit, and I trembled at every step. I arrived at its very edge, and the foundations seemed to crumble beneath my feet. I stooped over to take a view of the dreadful place, and the yawning gulf seemed to open wide its mouth to receive my fainting spirit. I beheld the worm that never dies and the fire that is never quenched. I heard the unutterable groans of the forever lost, and I saw the smoke of their torment, which ascendith up to heaven forever and ever.⁵

Her book, *A Missionary Offering*, was an appeal for support of the missionary society. Among those suffering the torments of Hell were those who had not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ because no missionary had been sent to them. Jesus said, *No one comes the Father except through me*. It was therefore a matter of urgency that people contribute to missionary societies that missionaries might be sent to all the world, that people might believe and be spared the torments of Hell. This argument has been used and abused by the missionary movement for two centuries.

Not everyone took this extreme a view when the missionary movement began. Benjamin Wisner, one of the executives of the

⁵[Mary Lyon], *A Missionary Offering, or, Christian Sympathy, Personal Responsibility, and the Present Crisis in Foreign Missions*. Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1843, p. 27.

missionary society, addressed this subject in a sermon in 1824:

“Do you mean, then,” perhaps it will be asked again, “to assert that none who live and die in Pagan lands can be saved?” I do not. I am willing to admit the possibility of there being some, even in those regions in midnight darkness, so far enlightened by the Spirit of God, as to be sensible of their guilt, and their need for a propitiation of their sins, and to trust in the divine mercy to provide such a propitiation, and, for its sake, to forgive and save them.⁶

Wisner felt compelled to add an editorial footnote to the printed version of this sermon (unusual - perhaps at the request of others to qualify his remark) that he was aware of only four such persons.

The more rigid interpretation of the Scriptures continued to bring in money to support missions, but also to create problems. Robert Hume, a missionary to India, heard native converts to Christianity express their concern for the eternal state of their non-Christian parents and grandparents. Hume comforted them with the doctrine of *future probation*. This was the belief that persons who died without the opportunity to accept Christ, would have the opportunity after death. However, in 1886 the mission board clearly rejected this doctrine.

Today, most Christians are uncomfortable with the words of Jesus, *No one comes the Father except through me.*

Let's take another look

⁶Benjamin B. Wisner, *The Moral condition and Prospects of the Heathen: A Sermon Delivered at the Old South Church in Boston, Before the Foreign Mission Society of Boston and the Vicinity, in their Annual Meeting, Jan. 1, 1824.* Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1824, p. 34.

There is another passage that cannot be ignored. In the Parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). The Son of Man is the judge of ALL the nations. He says to some:

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

These people expressed surprise; after all, they were neither Jewish nor Christian; they hadn't been told to do these things. The King replies, *Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.* According to Matthew 25, persons who have not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, are accepted by God on the basis of how they treat the least of persons. How do we reconcile this idea with John 14:6?

John 14:6 can be translated *I am the way of truth and life.* Jesus IS that way. People who live their lives in this way are in Jesus, whether they know the name or not.

But, let's take yet another look

Why do we connect salvation, or "coming to the Father" with heaven? The WAY is here on earth. We find salvation here on earth. We live in the kingdom/realm of God as we find peace in the grace of God and live as Christ has shown us to live. We welcome as friends and co-workers all who live in The WAY, whatever their religion.