



Looking Out My Window, July 22, 2022

We continue our discussion of language and worship. Until the last few decades, almost all the leadership of the churches and almost all those doing biblical scholarship were males. As late as 1995, there were fewer than forty women in the USA with Ph.D.'s in biblical studies. Not only was the biblical culture male dominated, the modern worlds of biblical and liturgical studies were predominately male. Not surprising that the role of women in Scripture and in the early church got short shrift and that language about God favored the masculine metaphors (like "father") and masculine pronouns. In my view, both the absence of a feminine reading and theologizing presence and the effects of patriarchy were in play.

Would it surprise you to know that, by one count, are more than forty places in Hebrew Scripture where feminine images and metaphors are applied to God? And, you might be surprised at the prominent roles of women in biblical stories in both Hebrew and Christian Scripture. The Revised Common Lectionary, which we only in recent years began to follow, includes more of those passages in the Sunday readings. In addition, feminine images and concepts lie hidden from view beneath the English translations.

God is neither male nor female. God relates to us in ways similar to fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and friends. Our language about God needs to reflect that broader relational world. Living into a more fully diverse and safe community of faith for all people involves creating a more safe and inclusive worship space. That space will come about more fully as we broaden our use of language and detach from our favored habitual ways of referring to God. To do less is to risk making our smaller circle of symbolic images for God into an idol, one that truncates our understanding of God and our spiritual experience.

The Presbyterian liturgical scholar and church musician Brian Wren said of language, "Language, like tobacco, is habit forming. Some patterns of writing and speaking are addictive and may damage both the user and others who breathe the same linguistic atmosphere. If we see the damage being done and decide to kick the habit, we may get withdrawal symptoms and hostility or derision from other smokers. But, in the end, we shall enjoy breathing fresh air." [Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow?* (New York: Crossroads, 1993), pp. 82-83.]

God's peace,

Handwritten signature of David W. Perkins+ in blue ink.

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