

Assorted thoughts and observations that I posted on FaceBook 2019-2022

===== 0 =====

7/19/2019 **Making Marriage Work:** I stole this post from my friend Kevin Hunt. My LIFE group at Trinity discussed Mark 10 (Jesus talking about divorce).

Given 50% of people in the country (and in church) are divorced; I thought a little theft of this text was permitted. Do not throw in the towel too quickly. If he/she was your best friend, figure out why and get back to that BFF friendship status. Find an older couple to befriend about those rocky shoals BEFORE it reaches the hopeless situation stage. Moreover, if the past relationship dissolved and you have remarried ... work on staying married this time around. It is worth it.

Kevin posted: "For couples so eager to call it quits after the infatuation wears off, to throw in the towel on your relationship because everything isn't 'perfect'... here is some food for thought. Lifelong commitment is not what most people think it is. It is not waking up every morning to make breakfast and eat together. It is not cuddling in bed until both of you fall asleep. It is not a clean home, filled with laughter and love making every day.

It is someone who steals all the covers and snores. It is slammed doors and a few harsh words at times. It is stubbornly disagreeing and giving each other the silent treatment until your hearts heal, and then offering forgiveness. It is coming home to the same person every day that you know loves and cares about you in spite of, and because of, who you are. It is laughing about the one time you accidentally did something stupid. It is about dirty laundry and unmade beds. It is about helping each other with the hard work of life. It is about swallowing the nagging words instead of saying them aloud. It is about eating the easiest meal you can make and sitting down together at a late hour because you both had a crazy day. It is when you have an emotional breakdown and your love lays down with you and holds you, and tells you everything is going to be okay. Moreover, you believe them. It is about still loving someone even though sometimes they make you insane. Loving someone is not always easy. Sometimes it is hard. But it is amazing and comforting and one of the best things you will ever experience."

===== 0 =====

1/16/2020 **Khmer Rouge:** There was a 2-day evangelistic event by Franklin Graham in Phnom Penh recently. He noted a fact that I suppressed after the Vietnam War era.

"Cambodia suffered a mass genocide [by] the communist Khmer Rouge [an atheist State] from 1975 to 1979. One quarter [25%] of the population was killed. Fields near Phnom Penh were the site of mass executions and graves, now known as the killing fields. [Foreign] missionaries fled the country, and it is thought that only 200 [Cambodian] Christians survived that era, when ["reactionary"] religion[s] was viciously persecuted."

My kids were not born yet. Two generations have grown up never hearing about this atrocity. It was frightening news to churches back in the day.

===== 0 =====

4/3/2020 **Whatever!** The following "whatever" verse appeared on my daily calendar this morning and is sociologically suitable for all humans, actively religious or not. It is not pollyannaish or blindly optimistic, but following this Bible verse encourages us to extend words of comfort to neighbors and gratitude to COVID virus support workers.

Philippians 4:8 "*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*"

Yours for finding and encouraging such things in our lives.

===== 0 =====

4/5/2020 **Palm Sunday:** I read Exodus all month from "*The Torah, A Modern Commentary*" (Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Fourth Edition, 1985). While reading during Passover season from this Jewish perspective, it fascinated me to have it quote many historic Christians with few disputes over interpretation.

Rare this week, Maundy Thursday (Paschal) falls on the first full day of Passover (Pesach) this year. One describes the Exodus of the Jewish community (see any Haggadah), and the other speaks to human need for an internal heart-level Exodus. The comparison of Jesus to Moses thus pops up in my readings. While Jewish and Christocentric theologies obvious disagree, Exodus is a powerful metaphor calling us to God this week in our respective faith calendars.

The COVID quarantine isolates us but we can still remember Exodus at heart-level as if we were physically at table together. Hag sa'meach and Gloria a Dios.

===== 0 =====

4/12/2020 **Resurrection:** What is the deal with Jesus coming alive after burial in a rock-cut tomb? It is the defining fulcrum of Jesus-centric faith. If false, we have a discredited, deposed, delusional, dead dude. Discard him quickly! If true, it validates two things.

First, it would validate the core Jewish beliefs set by the first century Pharisees (as opposed to all pantheistic or non-supra-natural systems). Even though castigated by Jesus for their hypocrisy, he confirmed their core foundational beliefs.

Second, it would validate everything Jesus said about God and himself. If he came alive as his peasant Jewish followers claimed, then there would be the sole holy God of Israel who seeks our trust from all ethnic backgrounds. Soon, goyim (various ethnic peoples, now worldwide) were/are suddenly interested saying "*He is risen. He is risen indeed!*"

===== 0 =====

4/14/2020 **Passover:** Here is a video of a Chassidic (Chabad in particular) take on Isaiah's messianic chapters 10:27 thru 12:6. It is their standard reading for the end of Passover (since it makes a direct reference to the Exodus).

There is no way the Rabbi is the Chabad video for today will ever connect this to Jesus, but I cannot fault him for a traditional presentation of the future Messianic Age. As common to the Orthodox, they (and I) believe in a future Messiah and a resurrection from the dead. Traditional Christians say both occur when Jesus (Y'Shua) comes again with the loud blowing of the Shofar.

That juxtaposition makes hearing this section of Isaiah and this Rabbi's commentary worth the hour-long hearing by us in the churches.

Ha Shem = THE Name = Jewish way of saying YHVH (the sacred name of God). In most English Bibles, this appears as LORD fully capitalized. The Rabbi translates from Hebrew and thus says Ha Shem often. YHVH occurs ten times in my Hebrew copy.

===== 0 =====

10/20/2020 **Divine Comedy:** Some years ago our academic class at church used Great Courses audio lectures to summarize all 14,000 lines and memorable images of Dante's epic poem. This 1300's rhyming poem is not politically correct, is rather frank in concepts about love and politics, deals with real people whom Dante personally loved or despised, and raises theological eyebrows of Protestants (who arrived 200 years later).

Yet, the fundamentals of comprehending the human-divine interface have not been better explored. I really enjoyed a 40-minute summary video (a Prager U: Book Club advertisement). What I did not know (or forgot) is that the English does not carry the impact of the Italian sotto voce. The interview host read Italian and gave sample quotes.

===== 0 =====

12/22/2020 **Stages of Life:** Most of my life has been either organizing or researching data. Knowledge is having enough data to reach an understanding of a bigger picture. Wisdom is having enough years of processing data to avoid earlier mistakes and pass along encouragement for those just reaching the understanding stages of life.

Example: Parenting (or anything else). As a child and teen, parenting was not on my radar, other than deciding not to repeat the worst or embarrassing things of my parents. As a young parent, I made nearly all those same mistakes not knowing enough to do any better. My heart goes out to young parents. Then, just when godly wisdom started to take root, I was suddenly "too old" to know anything of value for young parents..

===== 0 =====

1/4/2021 **Civil Conversation:** I just watched the *Ben Shapiro Show* dated 12/31 in response to a gay [homosexual] conservative and applaud both Ben's and the caller's civility. Ben has an un-flummoxed support for traditional morals because of his orthodox Jewish outlook regarding Torah. He tries to live out that faith interpretation, sin and all. We obviously differ on overall faith tracks but we are more same than different in encouraging Bible engagement. (It takes me four years to cover the entire Bible and that slow speed fits my contemplative style.)

Mike Lipsie added, "I hope you read it in depth. We Jews take a year to read just the five books of Moses [Torah]. Plus selections from the Prophets [Nevi'im] and books of the Writings [Ketuvim] on specific holidays. (Moreover, we do it every year.)"

===== 0 =====

2/11/2021 **My Baptism:** I soon celebrate the 50th anniversary of my teenage decision to follow Jesus. I asked to be baptized into water after hearing that morning a teenage girl describe how much she had been involved in the Book of Romans. I wanted what she joyfully radiated [that Thursday morning].

I asked for Baptism only because I sought to close up a perceived gap between God and myself. I did not know much, if anything about Jesus. I was shocked that my father consented! That evening on Lincoln's Birthday, as the 20 or so people gathered to prepare for baptism, I truly heard the good news presented in a way that I understood.

It was not due to resistance. I simply had not heard it. I grew up fully secular and isolated. My father was hostile to religion. However, having lost everything in the Stock Market that year, he accepted an offer from my aunt to attend her church that February.

It was my first and only time in a church service until I left home. I had received a Bible from my mother and found myself drawn into the narrative, but I had no one to help me navigate the many sub-books within that book. It was mostly just ink on paper.

Now 50 years later, I still highly recommend Bible study (with helpers of course!) and following Jesus at heart level. I certainly do not regret making that decision. My father was perplexed and never lost his bristle. However, I found a spiritual explosion within me that became my profound identity, full of hope and grace and meaning.

===== 0 =====

6/9/2021 **Supra-Natural:** The normal bell curve (somewhat dubious for this statistic), with the supposed binary poles of "There is no God" and "There is only one God", is [largely ignored by] humanity far too busy with more tangible pursuits.

The curve itself is not binary. It should be worthwhile to explore if there is anything at all beyond what we call Nature (a huge closed system in scientific terms).

If there is something outside of our observable closed system, what are the implications? There could be multiple gods (polytheism, a la most civilizations), some residual "mega-mind" made up of all past sentient beings (Star Wars, et al), or a single pre-existent entity of some sort (monotheism).

These concepts are outside of observable Nature, thusly called Supra-Natural (as opposed to the common Hollywood presentation of supernatural or paranormal). We cannot talk about such concepts if there is nothing at all beyond Nature. This muse is not unique to me and I mostly credit C.S. Lewis in the first chapters of his book "Miracles" (1947).

Walt Kubitius added, "There are two questions to which the answers of Science are unconvincing: *What caused the Big Bang?* and *How did life begin?* However, Religion's answer to *How did God begin?* is no better. Humanity has a real problem confronting Beginnings and Infinity. Neither Science nor Religion can offer an intellectually satisfying explanation."

===== 0 =====

7/12/2021 **Virgin Birth:** I wrote some rational thoughts about the unprovable virgin birth of Jesus in a posted paper on my website. It surprised me that the Koran (Quran) more strongly emphasized the virgin birth than did the Christian Bible. I thought I was being original when I wrote a short muse-paper back on 6/2/2021. Then a month later on 7/2/2021, Biblical Archeological Society advertised a similar posting called "The Scandal of Jesus Birth". I did not steal their material. I am not Roman Catholic. My two-page muse appears on my web site.

===== 0 =====

8/2/2021 **Survival of Fittest:** "Might is Right" is both a false equivalence and a false syllogism, often meaning "Might defines what is Right." It follows the premise from zoology writ large, namely: only the strongest control the herd. Every political tyranny embodies this belief, left and right.

Yet, inwardly, most of us recoil at brute force, mob rule, violation of conscience, or other sanctioned bullying. Why is that? I propose that mere strength (physical or political), taken alone, can only assert [and satiate] the urge to dominate. Taken alone, it does not represent, generate, nor reflect [healthy] wisdom or morality.

===== 0 =====

11/12/2021 **Frailty**: At 68, recently and gratefully recovered from eight compromised ribs (three broke, five cracked) and since Tuesday sleep disrupted with an unexplained painful right knee (bursitis?), I am aware how frail the human body can become.

Indeed, we will all die. Yet, God sometimes heals rapidly and rarely instantly in my life merely by asking. I certainly do not deserve it. Even those who discount or write off such intervention will take for granted the self-healing properties built into our biochemical-mechanics. Medical research has discovered ways to cooperate and encourage such self-healing, but the actual healing activity is not well understood.

This is not to argue for God in the face of lack of another explanation, but it does point to a physical feature not explained by random chance either. Therefore, I awoke yet again by knee pain and asking the Lord for insight to cooperate with self-healing (RICE method, et al) or outright rapid relief. My days have been good but not the nights.

===== 0 =====

11/21/2021 **God as Father**: I have a framed poster at home that starts "*I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, ...*"

While there are over a hundred creation stories around the planet and mighty top-dog gods in most past and present religions, only a few communities consider such a god in familial terms: Navajo (Grandfather God), Jewish (Avinu Eloheinu Melech ha Olam), and Christian (Our Father in Heaven). [Islam treats calling God as Father as blasphemy.]

Few men can measure up to the ideal and demands of being a lifelong father. Not a few women recoil saying "*If God is anything like my father, I want nothing to do with him.*"

And yet, as a believer, the concept of the singular almighty God offering to be as close to me as the ideal Father (which I never experienced with my own father) attracted me as a young man and even more so as I have since aged up.

That was my thought awakening this morning as I prepared to gather to worship. We get to engage with the creator of the entire universe at such a familial level. What chutzpah! What gall! How bodacious! I am (and have past been) in constant awe and so grateful.

===== 0 =====

12/12/2021 **Messianic Lineage:** I am reading methodically Second Kings in the Bible and noting the practice of Kings liquidating potential contenders. Politics never changes.

The unprovable text tells of godly Jewish men who said that a future Messiah would come through Kings David and Solomon. This got very thin indeed. Case in point: Usurper, Queen Ataliah, not of the line of David, went on a rampage against the royal family to secure her throne [upon the death of her son, King Ahaziah.]

Joash, an infant, was stolen away with his nursemaid by his Aunt and collaborating priests for six years. He was the sole survivor of that purge. It feels very similar to the non-Jewish King Herod the Great (another ruthless piece of work) in his response that a new King (Jewish this time) had been born in Bethlehem.

Given this "thinning of the herd" mentality done by people in power, God sure seems on the losing end of that proclaimed lineage of the Messiah.

===== 0 =====

12/26/2021 **Chili Christmas Décor:** My adult kids visited Christmas week and asked for the backstory of the chili peppers in my windows. Apparently, I never explained it.

This is my much southwest nod to my college years in New Mexico (and a greeting to all the ex-pat transplants from that State who work at the two nuclear labs in Livermore) where the red chili is far more popular as Christmas decor than the poinsettia.

For myself, the triple chili stands for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (one triune God, not three gods, an unexplainable mystery no matter which analogy theologians attempt). It is an unavoidable concept each Advent simply because of the Christmas narrative.

The four sets of triple chili stands for biblical twelves: 12 sons of Israel (from which all other uses derive); the Sinai/Shiloh tabernacle contents in sets of 12 (ditto for the later Jewish temple in Jerusalem); 12 core students of Jesus (simply called "The Twelve"); and the 12 biblical lunar months (except whenever a 13th leap-year month is added).

The strings of cranberries [holding the chili pods] are merely a low-tech nod to American simpler rural decorations of generations past. The cranberries have no Biblical reference.

===== 0 =====

1/4/2022 **Being Holistic:** My daughter triggered some thoughts on making the New Year more holistic. We are tri partite creatures. We have our physical body, which needs good care and exercise. We have the part of us that is the real us, usually thought of our mind/emotions/attitudes/memories which needs good care and exercise.

In addition, we have a spiritual part, usually distracted and squashed by the swirl around us but needs our coach and savior Jesus to help us apply good care and exercise.

When we neglect one or more parts, we become poorer, affecting the remaining parts and makes us less helpful to those around us. Sprain a muscle and it makes it hard to concentrate or relax. The pain is so distracting. Each part normally takes only a small segment of our time each day... unless biking 60 miles (body), journal marathon about feelings or memories (soul) or going on a long faith-walk/hike in the woods (spirit).

However, for many of us non-heroic busy people, devoting as little as 15 minutes a day to each part, either before or after the normal workday, brings a healthy rhythm to life. Of course, the more time allotted, the higher the benefit.

===== 0 =====

1/19/2022 **Forgiveness:** "Forgive" is an odd word. We rarely do it and even more rarely receive it. Instead, we act as if good actions outweigh our bad. A court might take extra time with our good but, with an affirmed crime, the hammer indeed will fall. At my workplace, we said "*One 'Ah, Sh*t' wipes out a career of 'Attaboys'.*"

Similarly, most world religions propose some sort of judgement of our life, and indeed the Judeo-Christian texts presents God as claiming that role.

However, those Biblical texts are the only ones that speak of God forgiving the past of those who turn their life around, such as **Ezekiel** writing, "*If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil, they will die for it. And if a wicked person turns away from their wickedness and does what is just and right, they will live by doing so. Yet you people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.'*" and as **Isaiah** wrote, "*Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*" and I gladly echo **David**, who wrote, "*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.*"

The positive change that precedes forgiveness requires an internal metamorphosis. Women with a bad husband need to see an inner change before they will risk being maltreated again. Merely dressing up a skunk is insufficient. Likewise, compelled force does not create lasting change. We need an enabling external resource that can engage our essential self to change effectively in energetic ways.

===== 0 =====

3/23/22 – **Social Media** – I am recovering TV addict. I could not carry on a conversation if there was a TV running nearby. I'd be totally distracted. Decades later, I am now chasing rabbit trails with video social media ... so many worthy clips ... history, faith, how-to vids, travel, mine explorations, old episodes of Carol Burnett, etc. So, I offer this 40-year old skit [Isaac Air Freight- "Time Wasters Looks at TV"] for fellow video addicts. Some video is OK, but gracious, got to get to bed by 9pm ... but wait, there is a new cool vid I need to watch first.

===== 0 =====

6/8/222 – **Grief Observed** – I pulled out and watched a 1993 DVD "Shadowlands" about this incredible love story of a literary hero of mine [C.S. Lewis]. Fictionalized to compress six years into a few weeks. After 12 years of losing Anne to cancer, this movie was much cathartic but then again, I weep easily with thoughtful movies dealing with faith under loss.

===== 0 =====

11/7/22 **Thanksgiving** - Thanksgiving means we give thanks ... to someone. Decades ago, a local Rabbi and I agreed on mutual faith points while differing about Jesus. There is a God (a vital starting point that many dismiss). This sole God reveals himself through the Bible. He seeks to engage our self for right living (piety) and our willingness within a missional relationship (devotional action). We rarely get past a perfunctory prayer during Thanksgiving dinner ("Good Lord, Good Food, Let's Eat!"), but sincere gratefulness to this Biblical God is at the historic core of this unusual national holiday.

===== 0 =====

11/27/22 - **Advent #1** - Jaw-drop quote: "In the 1950s, there began a rediscovery that Jesus was truly a Jew [... born of Torah-observant Jewish parents]" pages 22 and 27 (discussing Luke 2), "Journal of Dialogue for Reconciliation", 1998, a Catholic booklet. Our Baptist sermon this morning came from Luke 2 echoing this identical topic. While theologians for centuries affirmed Jesus' background, leaders by 350AD complained that churches appeared too Jewish and steadily distanced from those attributes. So, the quote likely meant that Jesus' heritage had no visceral meaning for most people.

Footnote: It thus seems incongruous to have such a quote said about pre-WWII churches. That's why I think it was not a lack of mental assent nor historical ignorance, but some less tangible loss over the centuries to explain the "rediscovery" of the obvious during our lifetimes. As a poor parallel, Christmas carols about Bethlehem and Israel were complete mysteries to me growing up secular. I only later "discovered" what the carol lyrics meant all along. That is, the quote hints at a missing internalization of that aspect of Jesus.

===== 0 =====

12/4/22 – **Advent #2:** Imagine Mary trying to explain the Christmas narrative to her incredulous neighbors. It is no wonder that she kept the message from the shepherds under wraps for some time. First she and Joseph just spent a tough year trying to explain her pregnancy. Then, these scruffy guys arrive shortly after delivery and blab all over town about an audible message from angels. Surely, she connected the dots but this complicated being a normal family in a small town where your business is everybody else's business.

===== 0 =====

12/13/22 - **Advent #3** - The sermon this weekend noted that the wise men were likely not Jewish. Mary and Joseph had since found a rental in Bethlehem. Up to two years later, an eastern caravan (unknown number from an unknown country) visited King Herod (installed in 40BC by the Roman Senate). Herod was not Jewish and shipped off most Jewish wealth to Mark Antony in Rome. When Herod was (often) disturbed, the Jewish community worried. What then was the impetus for any foreigner to care about this backwater province, much less to think that some Jewish replacement warranted an expensive 980-mile trip by pack animals with the requisite armed escort? The storyline implies some influence from the exiled Jewish majority who remained in Susa (northeast of Israel). The Babylonian Talmud later arose from that same community. As the sermon noted, these wise men were not forced. They willingly chose at great cost to check out their interpretation of an astronomical anomaly. Stripped of tinsel and garlands, this narrative rings with historical nuance. This is why some Christmas cards make a pun by saying "Wise men still seek him.", referring to any willing studious person with focused intent and anticipation. Keeping my nose in the book

Footnote: I propose Susa for the reasons given above. You will note that the Bible does not say any more than from the sun-rising (east). Susa to Jerusalem is 980 miles (on current modern roads). It appears that the wise men attached themselves to an existing regular trade route caravan. Since the ONLY historical source for them is Matthew, there are no other historical sources available by definition. Thus, I looked eastward and examined the available circumstantial data to make my proposal for Susa:

- not everyone returned from Exile, a sizable Jewish population remained there,
- it is only significant city with large Jewish population at that time from the East,
- the old Babylonian DNA for astronomy would not likely be lost in that city,
- there seems to be historical affinity (possible through Daniel originally) by the secular powers with this long-established community).

Thus, there are sufficient pointers that "Magi from the East" is not a figment of the Roman Catholic Church editing a birth myth into the book of Mathew. Meaning, there is at least one suitable candidate city based upon historical knowledge that would not countermand the non-specific Biblical narrative. Maybe you can offer a different city than Susa. I welcome the evidence for alternative sites.

===== 0 =====

12/22/22 - **Advent #4:** Christmas, which I never understood to be religious as a secular youth, is all about Jesus. Yet each year, it identifies sore points among the monotheistic faiths. Jewish liturgy gladly calls God as Father ("Avinu Malchenu") as do Christians ("Our Father"), and neither is sexualized. (Happy Hannukah by the way.)

The Qur'an, however, decries that Allah is a father (since that term is explicitly sexual) and also says Allah has no need for a son. To Islam, Christmas makes Jesus into a Greek Demi-God, instead of the Holy Prophet they revere. On the other hand, the Qur'an is intensely emphatic about the Virgin Birth as a true miracle, to which traditional Christians say "Amen".

The Rabbis decry the use of the "virgin bearing a son" passage in Isaiah, saying it speaks merely of a girl having a normal first-born son as a prophetic sign. To the Orthodox Jewish community, that coming Messiah is a political figure, surely enabled by God, but solely as a human man. Indeed, the Jewish High Priests (plural, thanks to Roman meddling) hauled Jesus to the Roman courts because he blasphemed ("You, a mere man, claim to be God", they said.) The Soviets once treated such three-way religious loggerheads as an "opiate of the masses" (Marx) and should be physically eradicated (Stalin and Khrushchev).

Yet, I am still happy this season in spite of these irreconcilable differences among and about faith in God. I echo the Christmas angels refrain that God has brought good news and on earth, offers peace to those on whom his favor rests (text solely in Luke). Thus, I wish you and yours a joy-filled and faith-filled Christmas. Most churches of all brands welcome you into their Christmas services this upcoming weekend, whether you are Christian or not. A few will offer Saturday services this year. Take up their invitation.

===== 0 =====

12/22/22 - **Hanukkah** (photograph of Hanukkah menorah in midst of my Christmas Village) - The elevated candle is called the Sha'mash (servant) which is used to light all the others (eight eventually, see First Maccabees 4:52-59 and John 10:19-24). The Maccabean leaders chose the 25th Day for this annual celebration in the lunar month of Chislev (equivalent to our solar-based December). I use a white candle for the Sha'mash as best reflecting Zechariah 3:8 for that servant metaphor.

===== 0 =====