

GOD'S SECOND CAREER

Sermon by Wade Wheelock and Anne Marsh

Unitarian Congregation of Taos

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Wade: Now after that story (a shortened version of “Mrs. and Mrs. God in the Creation Kitchen,” by Nancy Wood), you might think that there could be no more fulfilling role than that of creator and controller of all that is, but such is not the case. At least not if the visitors who knocked on our door last week were for real.

Anne: They *said* they were God and the Goddess, and who were we to doubt it? They’d heard that Wade and I had made mid-life career changes and said they wanted to do the same. At first I thought they meant they, like us, wanted to become Unitarian Universalist ministers, which would certainly give us a leg up on the competition. But no, it turned out they were disillusioned with the job so many humans had assigned them -- “cosmic puppeteers,” as the Goddess sadly put it. They were sure that there were more rewarding career paths, and asked if Wade and I would help them talk through some options. They gave us permission to share that conversation with all of you.

Wade: As I recall, God had the first idea, and it was a doozy. God said, “You know, one of the problems with being creator and controller of the universe is that we never get a moment’s rest. So for my second career, I think I’d like to try something totally different, more relaxing. Something that draws a different kind of crowd than the usual solemn religious folks, but is still fervent and loyal. I think I’ll become a baseball player. I promise I won’t use all my super-powers, but just be the best a human could be. I think a switch-hitting centerfielder with power to all fields would be good. Like Mickey Mantle.”

Anne: Personally, I thought a left-fielder like Ted Williams would be more likely, since it’s a well-known fact that God is a Red Sox fan. But in any case, Wade and I had no doubt that God could be a fantastic ballplayer -- and the Goddess could be the first woman in the majors if she set her mind to it. But was this just going to be a brief fling, or would God stick it out and have a long career? We saw this as an important theological question -- is God’s involvement in human affairs fickle or temporary? And if God does stick around long enough to set some records, wouldn’t these need an asterisk? In all religious traditions, whenever the gods appear as humans, they have special powers. Which presents us with another theological conundrum: Can a God on earth truly understand what it’s like to be a human and set a realistic example for us to follow?

Wade: God considered our questions and said: “Hmmm. Maybe you’re right. And I can foresee some additional problems. I can imagine sportswriters speculating on whether I, as God, could create a pitcher who could strike me out. Most likely the pitchers in the league would figure out that to counteract my threat as a power-hitter, all they would have to do is walk me every time. That would show the ultimate triumph of the Daoist principle of yielding non-resistance over active power. But I would have made a heckuva centerfielder!”

Anne: Meanwhile, the Goddess had been thinking about an entirely different mid-life career change. She said, “Since so many different religions seem to think that God and I actually care what people -- especially women -- wear, I was thinking about a career in fashion design. I do wonder what the response would be if I decreed that women could wear whatever they pleased and men had to wear burkas. That might give us a few chuckles. But on second thought,

fashion is too shallow. What I really care about is a larger sense of beauty and creativity. So how about a career as an *artist*?”

Wade: Anne and I thought this was a better idea than the baseball player thing, and certainly many people attribute the beauties of nature to God and the Goddess anyway.

Anne: The Goddess agreed. “God and I love colors,” she said. “We delight in flowers, sunsets, butterflies, rainbows, the little everyday wonders all around us. So I’m thinking a painter. Or maybe a sculptor who could bring out the essence that lies hidden in her materials. The world is so beautiful.

Wade: The Goddess was pretty excited about her plan to go to art school, but Anne and I had to point out that, well, not *everything* about the world is so beautiful. What about all the ugliness and pain, the poverty and oppression, the heartbreak at the heart of life? How will painting butterflies address our deepest sorrows? And how can sculpting rainbows keep human beings from hating, fearing, and killing each other? The Goddess understood immediately.

Anne: She said, “Yes, there is so much suffering amidst the beauty. I weep for that suffering, and I don’t want to ignore it. God, we need to find a second career that involves helping people and the Earth. What could we do to make life better?”

Wade: “Maybe we should be tackling the root cause of these problems,” replied God. “Perhaps there’s some way we could help change human nature, since humans cause so many of the forms of hardship in the world, and feel suffering so acutely themselves. Maybe I should become a bio-engineer. They are doing so many amazing things with new devices, processes, DNA and gene therapy. If I put my considerable skills to use in that area, maybe we could have some really dramatic breakthroughs to overcome some of the built-in life problems.”

Anne: Well, Wade and I agreed that addressing the root causes of suffering was a good direction, but did God have the required skill set? We couldn’t resist pointing out that the original version of creation had a lot of design flaws. Take mosquitoes for example. And there’s the appendix, and (though I hated to say this in front of Wade, who’s had some painful experiences) kidney stones. Not to mention the much more important problems of human greed, selfishness, and prejudice. We asked God and the Goddess if they could change human genetic makeup so that people would always choose to do the kind and compassionate deed, rather than the evil and selfish.

Wade: But God didn’t like that idea. He said: “Then humans would just be robots. So being good has to mean having freedom and making choices. I’m afraid trying to solve all the problems of the world by re-engineering people won’t work after all. I think we need to *show* people how to be good, how to lead better lives. We need to demonstrate, *to be* the kind of people we had hoped humans would be. People can respond to an example of kindness and compassion. What do you think, Goddess?”

Anne: The Goddess sighed and said, “I think we’ve already tried this one so many times that it’s hard not to feel discouraged. Sure, I’d like a second career running soup kitchens or homeless shelters, or managing markets that sell local food, or giving micro-credit loans to lift the poor out of destitution. But throughout history there have been many men and women who have fought for freedom, equality, and justice for all. Who have given their energies and resources to the poor. Who have transcended the artificial boundaries of color, class, gender, and sexual orientation that divide people. And still change comes so very slowly. Maybe what we

need is a second career that somehow gives and sustains hope -- hope that people *can* build a better world.”

Wade: God was silent for a moment. Then he got an idea: “What the world needs is a peacemaker, one without partisan associations. How ‘bout I try my hand at being a diplomat? The people of the Earth have never really tried waging peace and making that their top priority. If helping others peacefully solve their disagreements received as much money as the world spends on armaments and armies, surely real progress would be made. We could have rapid-deployment battalions of peacemakers, dispatched to any conflict, who would listen to all sides and hammer out a just solution that included everyone. Will people alter their ways? I think my being an international diplomat diligently working for peace and showing them what a real commitment to non-violence and compassion looks like could make a difference.”

Anne: God is so idealistic! Wade and I would certainly wish God and the Goddess well if they decided on a career in peacemaking, but we had to note that Jesus and Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., tried, and look what happened to them. But of course, the lifetime of any leader in human history is finite. And we realized that all the second careers God and the Goddess had considered thus far were finite, too -- short-term forms of involvement in human history. When we gently mentioned this, God and the Goddess (who, if not omniscient, are pretty darn smart) got the point.

Wade: For God said, “As long as the Goddess and I only think of the nature of the sacred as an *external* force that does things *for* people and the planet, we have kept ourselves from our fullest potential. We need to allow people to realize that the holy power they seek from us really exists already in each of them.”

Anne: “Yes!” enthused the Goddess. “We’ve been thinking too small. Maybe our second career should be helping people rethink their ideas of the holy. The sacred is not out there someplace. Divine potential is embedded in every being.”

Wade: “Divine potential for what?” I wanted to ask, but God and the Goddess had vanished, leaving Anne and me with nothing but one bright red leaf on our coffee table and a room full of metaphors.

Anne: Perhaps you will say that Wade and I encountered the deities we wished to meet, and you may be right, for I cannot relate to God’s old career as controller of all that is. That job description raises too many insurmountable problems -- like how could the Holocaust happen or children starve? How could God permit slavery and injustice to continue? Why is one life spared while another equally worthy life is taken? And what kind of God could possibly be worried about sexual orientation or care who wins a football game?

And yet I do have a sacred sense of being part of a larger whole, a feeling of connection to all that is, a sense of being at home in the universe. For me, God is a spirit of love and connection. We experience this spirit in many ways: a comforting presence in times of loss and sorrow; a sense of wonder and gratitude by a river or on a mountaintop; a delight in the mind’s ability to see the universe incarnating itself in stars and in microbes; a mysterious pull toward justice and compassion and the awareness that our neighbor *is* our self.

"God" is a name -- not *the* name, a name -- for the "something larger" to which all these experiences point, and also a name for whatever it is *within* each of us that enables us to have

these experiences, and to feel the connections. In this sense, as Forrest Church puts it, God is greater than all, yet present in each.

Wade: This godly spirit we see manifested in the caring connections between and among people lies at the very heart of the universe. The cosmos came into existence and inexorably moved forward to the development of life. And out of life came the unstoppable quest for further life, for meaning, for love.

As Robert Weston has written: "Out of the stars have we come, up from time. Out of the stars, rising from rock and sea, kindled by sunlight on earth, arose life. Life from the sea, life from within, giving birth, rose to love. This is the wonder of time, the marvel of space -- out of the stars swung the earth. Life upon earth rose to love."

God needs no second career when this is God's real first career -- to be the universe in its sacred urge to bring forth holiness ever more fully. Love is our recognition -- the universe's own self-recognition -- of the holiness around us. The greatest joy, the greatest task for each of us is to love one another and love the world. To caress with caring and compassion every corner of the cosmos. This is God's eternal career and our career for as long as we live.

CLOSING WORDS

This is the day we have been given. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the world we have been given. Let us love its beauty and heal its pain.

This is the life we have been given. Let us make of it a blessing and a benediction.

Amen.