

Sixth Easter  
May 13, 2007  
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A few minutes ago in our collect for today we prayed that we might love God “*in* all things and *above* all things . . .”

It’s a tenuous balance for us to keep in our hearts and our minds: that God is both *in* all things – commonly called the immanence of God – *and* that God is *above* all things, or perhaps the better image is to say that God is *beyond* all things – God transcends all things. At all times God is *both* immanent – in all things -- and transcendent – beyond all things. Not one or the other, but both at the same time.

The incarnation of God in Jesus reminds us of this reality.

God *in* Jesus, revealing God to us.

God also *beyond* Jesus, greater than the human being who Jesus is.

God existing beyond the limitations that Christ assumes in human flesh, yet also very much living within them.

We encounter this reality not only in Jesus but in our interchanges with each other, too. We have those moments in which pure holiness breaks through our love for each other. God is very present in those moments, reaching through to us in the touch of a mother’s hand, or her stern word drawing us back, reminding us of who we really are. God is present in a meal shared at a critical time, or in an unexpected but much needed hug from a friend or a squeezed hand – needed more than we ourselves sometimes realize. *Little* moments with *huge* presence, a presence beyond the human beings involved, yet not possible in that particular way without them. It’s relatively easy for us to love God in such moments, to feel gratitude for those moments, for the people who bring God to us -- and for God, who inspires those moments and who reaches out to us through them.

For most of us, we have to consciously remind ourselves that it's only because God is also *beyond* those moments that God is able to be present in them in that way, drawing us together in communion with each other – making possible the kind of intimacy in which we come to know the awe-inspiring God who dwells both in the moment and beyond it.

All that is true in moments with each other; it's also true in church politics, or it can be -- when we're seeking the heart of God in the midst of us *and* beyond us. In the tension-filled conversations in the Anglican Communion – throughout the Christian family for that matter -- the balance between immanence and transcendence is part of the issue.

On the one end of the spectrum are those of us who emphasize the presence of God *in* all things and *in* all people. We've encountered God in minorities who have been excluded from fullness of life in the church and we insist that it is unjust to continue such a practice toward *any* of God's faithful people.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who emphasize God's transcendence, who emphasize God *always* calling us beyond *ourselves* to greater realities. Coupled with a particular understanding of scripture, this emphasis on transcendence becomes a demand for a one interpretation of living the faithful life.

Only by living into the tenuous balance between the two, and only by recognizing God both *in* all things and *beyond* all things, can we stay in holy relationship with each other. Not only *recognizing* God, but as our collect says, *loving* God in all things and in all people, as well as above us all.

It being Mother's Day today, a moment spent on the reality of parenting seems also to be called for. Parenting is a major image for God in our tradition, often expressed with male images, for example God as father. Of course other images exist, too.

One example is when, in the book of Genesis, God says, “let us make humanity in our own image . . . and so male and female God created them.” And at one point in the gospels, Jesus uses a female image when he talks about gathering the children of Jerusalem in the way a hen gathers her brood under her wings. Drawing them back close to him.

In a way similar to God, parents are continually balancing loving their children where we are *and* loving us by drawing us *beyond* where we are. It’s one of the most challenging parts of being a parent: to have wisdom in that loving. I imagine that love is challenging for God, too, who *has* the wisdom. And of course it’s one of the most challenging parts of being a child, too – both a human child and a child of God.

Partly it’s challenging for parents because none of us is God, and so we parents quickly come to know our own limitations and our inability to know perfectly what to do in every situation. And so we continually look beyond ourselves, both to each other, and to the God, whose vision and understanding *are* perfect, and who helps guide us in doing the best for those under our care.

Which leaves me at my final thought for this morning.

Our personal prayers so often acknowledge God *in* all things and God *above* all things. So often we take to God the situations of our lives for insight and healing and hope. And we take them to *God* because not only is God deeply involved in those situations; also God’s perspective is always greater, always larger than our own, and we trust that God is always working to bring about what is truly best for us.

For most of us, the rubber hits the road with God’s immanence, the way that God is involved in our daily lives – that’s often our greatest comfort as well as the point at which we must most deeply trust. However, we wouldn’t want God simply to be *in* all things, simply to be equated with all of daily life.

Part of what makes God *God* is precisely that transcendence that lifts us above our daily lives, as God calls us to look *beyond* what we perceive as our own self-interests when they conflict with some else's interests. In flashing moments of understanding, we come to realize that in God's transcendence, in God's way of seeing things, all faithful interests are finally met.

Sometimes that will mean that we must let go of what we want, sometimes the other party must let go of what they want, and sometimes we both must let go – or at the least, loosen our grip -- so that what **GOD** wants, what **GOD** envisions, is able to occur.

“O God, you *have* prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass *our* understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you *in* all things and *above* all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that *we* can desire . . . .  
*Amen.*”