

ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD

(09/26/10)

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 5:1-24
Luke 11:1-10

“Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.” (Gen. 5:24)

Last week, in our Thursday evening Spiritual Study and Growth Group, where I get a lot of ideas for my sermons, at least during those dry periods when I can't find any interesting bumper stickers, we were talking about Enoch. Actually, if you want to be technical, I was talking about Enoch. Enoch serves as an illustration of the applicability of Robert Assagioli's diagram of the psyche for our understanding of our relationship with God and, ultimately, our preparation for death.

Roberto Assagioli, the Italian psychoanalyst and founder of the school of Psychosynthesis, suggested that the human psyche could be pictured as an oval with our ego in the center. At the top of the diagram is our Higher Self, which religious people might call God, and at the bottom of the diagram is our Lower Self, which religious people might call the devil. These two poles, like magnetic poles, pull us in two directions. They either pull us closer to God and into a higher, more saintly life, or they pull us down, pull us toward the devil and into a life of evil.

Assagioli does not believe we are the passive victims of this cosmological power struggle, like iron filings caught between two magnets. In addition to being pulled in both directions, we also have the power to choose which of these poles of our psyche we will build a relationship with and which we will try to make as the center of our life. Following our Thursday night discussion of the implications of the story of Enoch for our understanding of death, it occurred to me that Enoch could serve as an example of someone who lived at the top of the oval, someone who lived close to God.

We don't know an awful lot about Enoch. According to scripture, Enoch was in the line of descendants beginning with Adam and Eve's third son, Seth. Adam was Enoch's great, great, great, great-grandfather. Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch's father,

Jarod, lived 865 years. Enoch was the father of Methuselah, who lived 969 years, and Methuselah was the grandfather of Noah.

I have always been fascinated by Enoch, but not because of his lineage or his longevity. It is interesting that the years of Enoch's life are believed to have been 365, the number of days in the solar year, one of the numbers or symbols of completeness. What I find particularly meaningful is contained in a single line of scripture, Genesis 5:24, which reads, "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him." In the Revised Standard Version, the passage reads, "then Enoch vanished, because God took him."

Enoch walked with God. I believe the passage "walked with God" only appears one other time in the Bible -- in relation to Noah. Genesis 6:9 tells us, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God." I also believe there is only one other account of a person in the Bible who doesn't die, who mysteriously vanishes at the end of his life -- Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind as he walked along with his successor, Elisha (2 Kings 2:11f). Even Jesus died. I suspect that as I get older and find myself approaching mid-life I realize that I am becoming very interested in the accounts of people who don't die.

How did Enoch walk with God? What does that mean? When a passage like this occurs only once or twice in the Bible, it seems to me that it must be describing something special. What would that have looked like -- Enoch walking with God? Even more importantly, what would it mean for me to walk with God? What would it mean for you to walk with God? What would it mean for us as a church to walk with God?

Maybe it means that Enoch was a good person, that Enoch followed God's laws. Then again, there were many people in the Bible who lived a good or moral life, who followed God's laws; that would hardly make Enoch unique. A second problem is that Noah, the only other person who was said to have "walked with God," like any good

sailor, got drunk as soon as his boat hit port, as soon as the Ark landed on Mt. Ararat. So I don't think the descriptive phrase "walked with God" is reserved for moral giants.

We also have another problem. There weren't many laws at the time that Enoch lived, in fact, there probably weren't any laws. Moses had not yet received the Ten Commandments. The Israelites hadn't appropriated the legal code of the Canaanites, the laws of the people whose land they conquered, the "if ...then..." laws like "if a man steals your ox, then he must return the ox and pay you four shekels, and if he runs off with your wife, he has to return your wife and pay you two shekels."

So Enoch could not have attained his special status by strict adherence to the Law, the cornerstone of Judaism. The only two laws I can find in the Bible up to Enoch's time were taken from the story of Adam and Eve and the story of Cain and Abel. The first was "Don't eat the fruit," and the second was "Don't go around killing your brother." Enoch didn't have to worry about the first since his great-grandparents, Adam and Eve had already been kicked out of the Garden of Eden, nor did he have to worry about the second since Enoch was an only child.

Enoch also couldn't have been special because of his membership in a certain religion, denomination or church. In fact, there weren't any religions in Enoch's time to which one could belong, religions, denominations or churches that take a patronizing if not overtly judgmental stance toward all other religious groups and belief systems. In any event, whatever it was that enabled Enoch to walk with God couldn't have had anything to do with his having been a member of the one-and-only true church.

I think what made Enoch special was that Enoch walked with God. I think Enoch walked with God all day long, and that because he walked with God and presumably talked with God as much as he did, his relationship with God continually deepened. Enoch had a profound sense of God's presence in his life. To Enoch, God was not a theoretical or theological abstract; God was a living presence. They walked and talked together every day.

In fact, one biblical scholar, in commenting on this passage, has suggested that this was probably what happened at the end of Enoch's life. He said that Enoch and God might have gone for walks every day, constantly talking with each other. One day they became so engrossed in their conversation that when they came to the end of the road, instead of turning back, Enoch and God just kept on walking and Enoch ended up in heaven.

I think this is a fascinating possibility because, if this what happened, then Enoch has something very important to teach us about death and how to prepare for our death.

I think Enoch knew that there is a reality or a realm out of which we came before our birth, a reality or a realm to which we will return after we die. Enoch also knew that we carry this reality or realm with us and within us throughout our life. This reality or realm is what we call God or the Kingdom of God. Enoch never felt separated from this realm by what one of the Reformed theologians has called "the infinite qualitative difference;" he never felt separated or alienated from God. Maybe Enoch never felt the need for a mediator -- whether that mediator is Jesus or the church or the Bible. Maybe Enoch just walked with God and talked with God all day long.

In the middle 1600's in France, a Carmelite monk who came to be known as Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, developed a spiritual discipline that I find congruent with what I believe to be the spirituality of Enoch. Brother Lawrence seldom read scripture. He went to Mass, but he never found it particularly meaningful. His spirituality came to be known as "The Practice of the Presence of God."

The Jesuit reformer Ignatius Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, recommends that we set aside a time in the middle and at the end of the day to practice what he called "The Examination of Conscience." This is a time to reflect on where we have experienced God's presence in our life that day. It is a time to examine our life, our thoughts, feelings and actions in the light of that presence. Brother Lawrence recommended that we do this all day long. He said it was actually an insult to God that

we should abandon our conversation with him for the trivial conversations and activities that occupy so much of our time. This was the only spiritual discipline Brother Lawrence observed, but through his deep dedication to it he became a spiritual giant.

If Jesus were riding with you in your car on the way to work, what would you say to him? Would you ask him to please be quiet so you could listen to the radio? If Jesus were sitting in your family room with you this afternoon, would you ask him to be quiet until the end of the Patriots' game? If at the end of the day, you and Jesus sat down to talk about your day, how would you feel about what you had done and had not done? What would it mean to see your day, your life through Jesus' eyes?

I have a hunch that this was what Enoch knew. I have a hunch that this is what scripture is trying to tell us when it is recorded that Enoch "walked with God." I believe Enoch talked with God all day long and lived his life out of a close personal relationship with God. I believe Enoch knew and lived out in a radical way what we tend to forget -- that God is really with us in the morning when we awake, when we are riding in our car, when we are at work, when we are with our family, when we are alone, at the end of the day, and that God is even talking to us in our dreams when we are asleep.

I think that Enoch has a lot to teach us about how to prepare for death. Remember, according to scripture Enoch never died. With every one of his ancestors, as we heard this morning, they lived a certain number of years and then they died. Enoch alone, of this whole list, is different. One day, mysteriously, Enoch "was no more;" he just "vanished."

We know Enoch didn't disappear in the sense of becoming lost. He just entered more fully into the reality or the realm of God. Because Enoch was so close to God in his daily life when he was alive, when it was time to die Enoch only had to take a baby step. When we view death as a taking a baby step closer to God, a baby step into God's presence, why should we fear it? We already know where we are going because

we have been there many, many times throughout our life. In the words of one of the members of our study group, the experience of death becomes a “gentle transition.”

What advice would Enoch give to us today? Enoch would tell us to walk with God. Enoch would tell us to talk with God -- all day long. Enoch would tell us that the secret of experiencing eternal life, whether in this life or the next, is to enter into a constant state of prayer, to build a relationship with this realm while we are alive. Enoch would tell us that there could be no greater preparation for death than this.

Enoch, the ancient patriarch of Judaism, and Brother Lawrence, the seventeenth century barefoot Carmelite, would have a lot in common. As Alan Watts has said, people like Enoch and Brother Lawrence were not followers or disciples of Jesus as much as they were friends of Jesus. They were doing in their lives what Jesus did in his. Jesus walked with God. Jesus talked with God. And, as we heard in our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus encouraged us to talk to God in what we call prayer. The spiritual giants throughout history were simply doing in their lives what Jesus did in his life and what we should be doing in ours.

Maybe this is what prayer in its simplest form is all about -- a constant conversation with that God who is the source of our life, the end of our life, and who is with us and within us while we are alive. Maybe this is what Enoch and Brother Lawrence knew, that the practice of the presence of God inevitably leads to a deepened relationship. If our worship service leads us to this, to a closer walk with God, it has accomplished its task.

How can we, like Enoch, walk with God in the week to come? If we can discover this, then we, like Enoch, might learn the secret of how to prepare for our death.

*A sermon preached by the Reverend Paul D. Sanderson
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