

## PEOPLE OF THE BIBLE -- ENOCH

(07/14/2024)

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)

Just in case you are attending this church today for the first time or the first time this summer, Charley Eastman and I have reestablished what I long ago termed a “Pony Express” schedule of worship for our two churches over a ten-week period this summer. On our designated Sundays, Charley or I lead worship at Pilgrim Church at 9:30, try to confine our worship to a forty-five-minute period, then race across town to lead 10:30 worship and preach the same sermon at First Community Church. Then we get to relax at First Community’s world-renowned coffee hour!

When Charley and I discussed this, we decided to focus our preaching on interesting people of the Bible. We weren’t thinking specifically about Jesus, though he would certainly number among the more interesting people in the Bible (if not the most interesting—at least to us Christians). We were thinking of some of the relatively little-known or lesser-known people in the Bible, sometimes very ordinary, everyday people who have something to teach us about God, about ourselves, and about life.

Remember—just like the communion of saints, all of the people in the Bible are a part of us. *All the people in the Bible are a part of us.* At times, I find this to be a sobering thought.

This Sunday, the first of my Sundays, I have chosen to preach on Enoch. I have chosen Enoch because I find him to serve as an illustration or illumination of the Italian psychoanalyst Roberto Assagioli’s diagram of the psyche for our understanding of our relationship with God, for our spiritual journey, including worship, prayer, and meditation, and ultimately our preparation for death.

Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974), the founder of the school of Psychosynthesis and author of a book by that name, suggested that the human psyche could be pictured as an oval (viewed in three dimensions it would be like an egg) with our ego consciousness in the center. At the top of the oval is our Higher Self, which religious people might call God, and at the bottom is our Lower Self, which religious people might call the devil. These two poles, like magnets, pull us in two directions. We are either pulled closer to God and into a higher, more saintly life, or we are pulled down toward the devil and into a life of evil.

Assagioli’s depiction of the psyche seems congruent with what we know of both the dark and the light sides of human nature. Our newspapers are replete with examples of people who have been pulled so far down that their actions, if not the very core of their being, are evil. We see examples of this in the genocide that is unfolding in the Middle East, in Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine, in the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and in several African regions. We see it in our own country—in mass murders like the one in Lewiston. I

know the Roman Catholic Church holds fast to the doctrine of *privatio boni*—the belief that there is no ontological reality to evil; it is only the absence, the privation of good. However, I believe we would have to be quite naïve to believe that there is no power or presence of evil in the world and also within us.

Assagioli, with his humanistic leanings, does not believe we are the passive victims of a cosmological power struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, like little iron ball bearings caught between two magnets. In addition to being pulled in both directions, we also have the power to *choose* with which of these poles of our psyche we will build a relationship, and which we will try to establish as the center of our life. Like the saints, e.g., Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa, it seems to me that Enoch could serve as a biblical example of someone who lived near the top of the oval, someone who lived close to God.

We don't know much about Enoch. We do know that 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 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, one of the numbers or symbols of completeness. I am particularly struck by a single line of scripture, Genesis 5:24 which, in the New Revised Standard Version, 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. Even Jesus died. I suspect that as I get older and find myself approaching mid-life, I am becoming increasingly 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 must be describing something special! What would that have looked like--Enoch walking with God? Are we to read the passage literally or metaphorically? 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 life, who followed God's laws; that would hardly make Enoch unique. An example of a good person would be Job. 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 docked on Mt. Ararat. So, I don't think the descriptive phrase "walked with God" is reserved for moral giants or saints.

We also have another problem. There weren't many laws at the time that Enoch lived. Moses had not yet received the Ten Commandments, so Enoch could not have attained his special status by strict adherence to the Law, the cornerstone of Judaism. The only 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 kill your brother." Neither of these, by the way, turned out well. Enoch didn't have to worry about the first law since Adam and Eve had already been kicked out of the Garden, and there is no evidence that there was any sibling rivalry between Enoch and his younger brothers and sisters.

Enoch also couldn't have been special because of his membership in a certain religion. In fact, there weren't any religions in Enoch's time to which he could belong, religions that provided their members with the comforting sense of superiority that enables one to assume a judgmental stance toward all other religions. 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.

*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! God was not a theoretical or theological abstract; God was a living presence. I believe that God and Enoch walked and talked together every day!

One biblical scholar, in commenting on this passage has suggested that this was probably what happened at the end of Enoch's life. 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 is what happened, then Enoch has something very important to teach us about death and how to prepare for our death. If we walk with God and talk with God every day, then, *when the time comes, we will just keep on walking.*

I think Enoch knew from experience that there is a realm from which we came before our birth, a realm to which we will return after we die. Enoch also knew that we carry this realm with us and within us throughout our life. This realm or reality is what we call God or the Kingdom of God. Enoch never felt separated from this realm by what one neo-Reformation theologian has called "the infinite qualitative difference;" he never felt separated or alienated from God by his sin. Enoch never felt the need for a mediator--whether that mediator is the Law or 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 a Carmelite monk who came to be known as Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection developed a spiritual discipline that is congruent with the spirituality of Enoch. Brother Lawrence seldom read scripture. He went to Mass, but he did not find it particularly meaningful or helpful. His spiritual discipline or path came to be known as "The Practice of the Presence of God."

The Jesuit reformer Ignatius Loyola recommends that we set aside time in the middle and at the end of the day to practice what he called "an examination of consciousness." This is a time to reflect on where we have experienced God's presence in our life that day, and to examine 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 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 later this afternoon, would you ask him to be quiet until the end of the Red Sox' 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, to see your life through Jesus' eyes?

I have a hunch that this was what Enoch knew—that Jesus *is* in the car with us, that Jesus *is* in the family room with us, and that Jesus is in this church with us this morning! 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 not only walked with God; 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.

Enoch can teach us how to prepare for death. Remember, according to scripture Enoch never died. With every one of his ancestors, as we heard in our scripture lesson 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."

Enoch didn't disappear into thin air or into nothingness; he entered more fully into the reality or the realm of God. Because Enoch was so close to God in his daily life while 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 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.* The experience of death then becomes what we might call a "gentle transition."

What advice would Enoch give to us today? Enoch would tell us to walk with God--all day long. 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 this is how we should prepare for our death.

Enoch, the ancient Jewish patriarch, and Brother Lawrence, the seventeenth-century barefoot Carmelite, 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  
The First Community Church of Southborough  
[www.firstcommunitychurch.com](http://www.firstcommunitychurch.com)  
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An audio version of this sermon will be posted on our church website later this week.