Jesse’s Sermon

Before I begin, I would like to preface this. All of the quotes i'll be using are from Neil Gaiman, the writer of The Sandman, a graphic novels series, which follows the story of the Morpheus, the anthropomorphic personification of Dream, the physical form of sleeping, imagination, and perception. Neil Gaiman is a huge influence to my writing, and has had a huge influence on my viewpoint of our human nature.

Imagination and perception is the window into how we sense reality around us. I consider myself as a connoisseur of imagination, as it's what I do with most of my free time. Creativity is a difficult concept to truly contemplate, and as i've found with most of the rest of reality, crumbles upon close inspection, as if to hide some wisdom we were never meant to behold. The fact that I can look upon all of you and see your faces, go up and touch your hand to shake it, yet I am unable to know what you're thinking confounds me.

**Everybody has a secret world inside of them. I mean everybody. All of the people in the whole world — no matter how dull and boring they are on the outside. Inside them they've all got unimaginable, magnificent, wonderful, stupid, amazing worlds … not just one world. Hundreds of them. Thousands, maybe.**

*Barbie, in Sandman #36, "I Woke Up And One Of Us Was Crying"*

Where does perception even happen. When does it happen? The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows created the word Sonder, which they define as “the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own." What a great word. Greatly profound.

 Perception is our tool outward but not inwards. We see and hear, yet share nothing internally. Communicating what we are thinking and perceiving, that is creativity. One of my personal favorite examples of creativity is storytelling. You've all heard one before, in fact, i'm telling you one right now. I'm translating the intangible, incorporeal ideas in my head, out my mouth, and into your ears. Somehow i've broken off a piece of the thing that has never existed, an idea, and you took it, each of us having that same thought in our head that has no weight, no mass, yet this story is priceless.

 (Pause)

Dreams. Dreams are the stories we tell ourselves when we are alone, slipping through the doorway into our head under the night sky. Most of us walk around in our own head during the night, but i'm sure many of you have also experienced the phenomenon known as daydreaming. In both, you go into this trance, engrossed in the infinity that is your imagination unfolding endlessly, delighted in the nothing that is the space in your head, which does not exist, building a bottomless, boundless world.

**It is *never* "only a dream",**

*Dream, in Sandman #3: "Dream a Little Dream of Me"*

The Sandman series has a central theme of questioning of our reality, and whether or not it’s a figment of our perception, and Even if that matters.

 **Things need not have happened to be true. Tales and dreams are the**

**shadow-truths that will endure when mere facts are dust and ashes, and forgot**.

*Dream, in Sandman #19: "A Midsummer Night's Dream"*

Does our perception create our reality? What if we are not placed in a stagnant world together where each person sees, smells, or hears the same existence, but a world we create, a fairy tale, that some people happen to agree upon.

We are the sum of our memories, and if we can't trust our memories, can we trust ourselves? Here is my favorite example of how memory defines us:

 All of you know that I exist. Whether you knew before now, or you learned today, you now know I exist. Some of you have known me for the entirety of my existence. But for those of you who at one point did not know me from when I was born to now, think back to when you didn't know me. To you, I did not existed. And if you never met me and no one told you about me, I would still not exist. But from the moment you learned about me, I had always existed. Right there, at that moment when you learned about my life, you replaced your reality with one that included me.

 In your mind, you created me. And in this way, our creativity, creations, and perceptions are inseparable, entwined, indivisible. Creativity is the only outlet we have onto the world. Perception is another one of our creations, bent to our will as we must. Creativity can shape how we perceive the world, and how you see the world affects your creativity.

**Dream the world. Not this pallid shadow of reality. Dream the world the way it truly is.**

*The visionary cat, in Sandman #18: "A Dream of a Thousand Cats"*

The perception we create effects how we feel, what we strive for, and our moral compass.

The Sandman series exemplifies this idea. At one point Morpheus, the personification of Dreams, enters hell to retrieve something he's lost. He then attempts to leave, but is halted by Lucifer, the fallen angel.

**The *million* lords of hell stand arrayed about you. Tell us, why we should let you leave? Helmet or no, you have no power here — what power have dreams in Hell?"**

**"You say I have no power? Perhaps you speak truly. But — you say that *dreams* have no power here? Tell me, Lucifer Morningstar... Ask yourselves, all of you, what power would Hell have if those here imprisoned were not able to dream of Heaven?"**

*Lucifer and Dream, in Sandman #4: "A Hope in Hell"*

(Pause)

In that moment, all the malevolent demons go silent, then part to make a pathway for Morpheus, as he walks out the gates of hell, as even Lucifer will not stop him.

 (Pause)

I will leave you with one more quote from The Sandman. Gilbert, a well educated gentleman attempts to calm down his friend Rose walker, a young woman who is in the middle of a tough situation, as she is scared for her life and for her family. He brings up philosophical questions to distract her.

**"If I hear another of your theological paradoxes, I'll scream. Frankly, today I don't care if God exists or not."**

**"I doubt He feels likewise, Miss Walker."**

*Rose Walker and Gilbert ("Fiddler's Green" assuming human guise in the form of Gilbert K. Chesterton) in Sandman #14: "Collectors"*

Jennifer’s Sermon

Our theme this month has been creation. I invited Jesse to join me in presenting the sermon because awhile ago when I was talking about this theme at home he started saying some things that I thought were interesting. Not wanting to steal his ideas it seemed better to hear directly from him.

As Jesse pointed out in his remarks to consider creation brings up questions that we humans try to answer again and again. Why are we here - why was this creation created. What is the driving force behind this creation.

Cultures across the world and across time have created explanations and answers to these questions. I sometimes think that out of a self centered sense of grandeur we call our explanations science and their old explanations myth.

And those explanations have changed over time - even our science has changed, evolved over time. There was Aristotlean science that believed in five elements water air fire and earth and aether the divine substance that makes up the heavens, There is newtonian science - that explains what happens on this earth pretty darn well, but not so much on the smaller than atom level, and then came to Einstein and his theory of the big bang, and we are moving into a time of quarks and dark matter and who knows.

Scientists look at theology and scoff - because many times a 21st century scientist is considering 18th century theology. As Jesse quoted earlier - "If I hear another of your theological paradoxes, I'll scream. Frankly, today I don't care if God exists or not." "I doubt He feels likewise, Miss Walker." The theologies that built our religious organizations in America by and large were based in Newtonian physics and so there is this huge mismatch between modern science and old theology. - but what about a philosophy or a theology that is based more in einsteinian physics and that would be process philosphy or theology first developed by Alfred North Whitehead.

In process theology God is an important concept and participant in creation. It is a panentheist system - the sacred is in all parts of creation and the sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

Jay McDaniel wrote a thorough process definition of God.

 "**God:** The universe unfolds within a larger life – a love supreme – who is continuously present ... as a lure toward wholeness relevant to the situation at hand. In human life we experience this reality as an inner calling toward wisdom, compassion, and creativity. Whenever we see these three realities in human life we see the presence of this love, thus named or not. This love is the Soul of the universe and we are small but included in its life not unlike the way in which embryos dwell within a womb, or fish swim within an ocean, or stars travel throught the sky. This Soul can be addressed in many ways, and one of the most important words for addressing the Soul is "God." The stars and galaxies are the body of God and any forms of life which exist on other planets are enfolded in the life of God, as is life on earth. God is a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. As God beckons human beings toward wisdom, compassion, and creativity, God does not know the outcome of the beckoning in advance, because the future does not exist to be known. But God is steadfast in love; a friend to the friendless; and a source of inner peace. God can be conceived as "father" or "mother" or "lover" or "friend." God is love.” <http://www.jesusjazzbuddhism.org/what-do-process-thinkers-believe.html>

I really like that definition - it is a little hard to follow so it is easier to just use the word God as a shorthand but the most important sentence in that whole paragraph is “God is Love” And what is critical to understand here is that the God of Process theology does not exist outside of the system. The universe is in process and so is God. God is unfinished - infinitely unfinished. We add to God and God adds to us.

We live in “***A Fluent World***

*Imagine a mountain on the banks [of a river. It seems] solid. It is not liquid; you can climb it without sinking. You can fall on it and hurt your knee. It does not seem to be in process at all. It seems instead to be stubborn and changeless. But physicists tell us that this solidity is not the whole story. There is a great deal of energy in the mountain. Some of it is in the atoms and molecules of the mountain and some of it is in empty spaces. But all of this energy is dynamic and changing, more like a river than a rock. It may look like a noun, but energetically it is a verb. It is a complex and multifaceted event: an act of mountaining. Chinese philosophy speaks of it as possessing a continous creativity of its own: qi or 气*

*Even the atoms are dynamic. Consider an electron within the atom. Quantum physicists tell us that it is composed of a series of momentary bursts of energy: a series of momentary happenings or pulsations. An electron is not solid and unchanging; it is the happening of one of these pulsations of energy, and then the happening of the next, and then the happening of the next. The electron is not a thing, but rather a succession of happenings.*

*Buddhists tell us that our consciousness is a stream of perceptions and feelings and ideas which are never the same at any two moments. Physicists tell us that an electron is a stream of pulsations of energy, none of which are precisely identical at any two moments. Whitehead agrees with both of them. Everywhere we look we see streams. The world is fluent like a river, because the world is a process of becoming and [its parts] are processes of becoming, too. [italicized portions taken from* <http://www.jesusjazzbuddhism.org/the-many-become-one-and-are-increased-by-one.html> ]

In Process thought "[creativity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creativity) is the absolute principle of existence, and every entity (whether it is a human being, a tree, or an [electron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electron)) has some degree of novelty in how it responds to other entities, and is not fully determined by [causal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causation_%28law%29) or [mechanistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mechanism_%28philosophy%29) laws” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_North_Whitehead>

Process thought understands this absolute creativity to be part of all of creation and of God. God desires there to be novelty, change evolution. There is no grand plan and God does not command the universe. God is a verb, God is love, and that love lures us and itself to be co-creators in this universal creativity.

How many times have you said, or heard someone say “Oh I’m not creative” In a process view one really can’t say that. Every every action, reaction, intuition, decision is a creative coming together of many threads of ones existence that then leads to the next experience and the next. Creativity is the engine that fuels this. And it is the lure of love, or God that leads us on.

The world is not sacred because God created this world (that would be the old theology) it is sacred because it is creating God that huge amazingly wonderful cacophony of creativity of love of energy.

Yesterday as I was trying to find the conclusion to this sermon I took a walk – I went down to the lake near my house, I took a moment to look at the water with the setting sun shimmering across it, at the birds busy hunting and gathering in preparation, at the grass so ready to just about burst forth – and it hit me – everything here is alive, the trees, the beams of light , the atoms of water, the air unseen, all of it is interconnected, all of it humming with a life force barely within my understanding.

 The creativity that powers this universe moves it ever evolving into more complex systems and the arc of the evolutions bends toward the good.