

Book Reviews

From the old hymn, "Advent tells us Christ is near, Christmas tells us Christ is here. In Epiphany we trace, all the glories of His Grace". I remember first being aware of the meanings of church seasons from this song.

Waiting and preparing during this time of Advent can be such a good time, however we do it. I have chosen two books to review, both of which can be seen as a time of waiting;

1) *While We Wait* by Mary Lou Redding

This booklet is sub-titled Living the Questions of Advent and can be used either by an individual or as a group study. In it we have a chance to look at some biblical figures on whom we don't always focus such as Tamar, Ruth, Mary, Zachariah, Elizabeth and the Magi.

The book looks at Advent as a journey in which God seeks us at many levels of our understanding and spiritual willingness. It allows for real-life struggles and questions as a legitimate part of Advent's spiritual exploration.

2) *Without Guarantee: In search of a Vulnerable God* by Bob Purdy

Several of us have had a chance to meet Bob and his wife Trish since they have recently joined St. Paul's. I had a chance to sit down with Bob to talk about his book which was written about five years ago. Bob questions the ancient assumption that God is omnipotent, almighty and powerful at the same time as loving which by definition and experience means open to hurt, surprise, failure and not controlling.

Below is Bob's description of his very intriguing and helpful book.

"For millennia humans have assumed that God or the gods are omnipotent, all powerful. But if God is love God must be vulnerable. Love is always vulnerable, never exercises domination top-down power. Vulnerable and omnipotent do not go together. This book explores the vulnerability of a God who lets-self-go to enter into the life of every person and all creation, and love from the bottom up, from the inside out. Such divine love is strong, tender, passionate, patient and always vulnerable. Our vulnerable God does not manipulate or control, cannot fix life, but is striving as love always strives to bring about the *common good* for the whole of creation and each individual part of it. Because God is love, ideas about judgement, damnation and hell are human constructs rather than divine. They are projections on to God of human anger, violence and desire for vengeance.

The author first explores this strong but vulnerable love of God through four biblical metaphors which give depth and meaning to the word love: *faithful loving-kindness, compassion, womb-mercy and self-giving*. Then he reflects on that love in relation to prayer and especially prayer for healing, to spiritual authority, to creation and evolution and to justice and God's longing for the healing of life.

He ends by exploring how vulnerable love impacts his understanding of Jesus, whom he names *servant-lover of a vulnerable servant-God*".

This would be an excellent book for a group study and Bob has available copies.
Mary Dove