

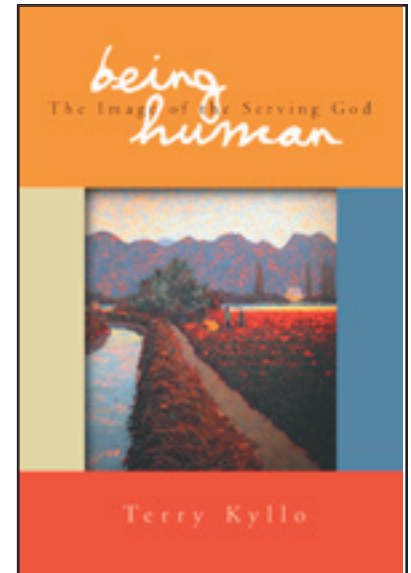
Study Questions for

Being Human: The Image of the Serving God

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Chapter One: Faith Communities: What and Why?

1. How do you feel about Joan's approach to religion?
2. What is the difference between a faith community and a faith tradition? What are the goals of a faith community? A faith tradition?
3. Does our culture teach us to avoid our mortality? If so, how? Is dealing with our mortality important?
4. The author makes the claim, along with many other authors, that our culture is experiencing a famine of meaning and community, as well as a famine of basic needs. Is famine a good metaphor for what is happening in our culture?
5. Can a faith community help people deal with what is ailing our culture?
6. What is the main goal of religion? Is the author right in saying it is meaning and community?
7. How do you imagine the faith community helped Ruth? How did Ruth help those in the faith community?
8. How could a faith tradition and a faith community help us "re-imagine" our lives?

Chapter Two: Faith Communities Aren't Perfect

1. How do you think faith communities have contributed to the famine of meaning and community and the famine of basic needs?
2. Do people sometimes have too high expectations for a faith community? What role does a person's history, ways of relating to people, etc, have in their relationship with a faith community?
3. What is your history with faith communities? What are your expectations?
4. What important role does the understanding of ourselves as "saints and sinners at the same time" play in a Lutheran faith community?
5. Can humans attain control and all the answers? What is the meaning of idolatry? Does it undermine our human capacity for wonder?
6. How would you have felt if you were the family that had the stillbirth? How do you feel about the first pastor's theological response to them?
7. How did the family overcome their bad experience with this pastor?
8. How have you felt about sexual abuse on the part of clergy and other professionals? Do you agree with the author that the fact such abuse is becoming known is actually a good thing?
9. What does "personal salvation" mean to you? What is the relationship between personal salvation and the salvation of the world?

Chapter Three: Our Search for Truth

1. What is the basic approach of “truth as a puzzle?” What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
2. What is the basic approach to “truth as a waste of time?” What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
3. What is the basic approach to “truth as a glorious mystery?” What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
4. What do you think the relationship is between truth and doubt? How do these interplay in your own decision making?
5. What is the difference between defining something or someone, and describing something or someone?
6. Is humility (acceptance and awareness of ones limitations) important to talking about the meaning of life?
7. What are the implications of the idea that God’s inner nature is hidden? Revealed?
8. Is it possible to trust a God that gives only a “reliable sneak peek” through a tradition? How do we come to trust that the tradition, with its problems and imperfections is reliable?
9. Are words about God like a portrait of a parent colored by a child?
10. Is it necessary for people in the tradition to critique the tradition?

Chapter Four: Anything but Human

1. How have you understood the word “sin”? With your understanding, has it been a helpful word to you?
2. What is the Lutheran faith tradition’s understanding of sin? What are the relationships that humans were made for?
3. What do you think about the idea that the man and the woman in the Genesis 2-3 story represent all humanity?
4. Does the story say that women are subservient to men?
5. The man and the woman wanted to be like God. What do you think this means?
6. Does the story say that humans were immortal and unlimited before they ate the fruit, or was mortality and limitedness a part of their “very good” creation?
7. Is it true to your experience that humans try to be more or less than we were created to be?
8. Is it possible for God to love us and still take the hurtful things we do seriously?
9. Is it true to your experience that all people tend to sin, trying to be more or less than they are created to be?
10. What is the importance of ethic and morals in fulfilling love?

Chapter Five: Three Kinds of Christianity

1. What is the basic image of Christianity presented by the media?
2. What is the basic understanding of "Don't Worry, Be Happy" Christianity? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
3. Can love ever be disinterested?
4. What is the basic understanding of "God of the Gun" Christianity? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
5. Is it possible to love a God who threatens you?
6. What is the basic understanding of "God of Grace" Christianity? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
7. Which is the stronger motivation: gratitude or fear? Which one lasts the longest?
8. Do humans tend to trust our moral and religious accomplishments? Is there a kind of slavery, however, in trusting our own accomplishments?
9. How does God seek to free us from this kind of slavery?

Chapter Six: What Jesus Does

1. What has been your understanding of what Jesus does?
2. What is the basic story of Anselm's theory?
3. What was the basic question that Anselm was trying to answer? Is this still the basic question for people today?
4. What are the problems with Anselm's theory, according to the author?
5. What was your understanding of sacrifice before reading this book? What does the author say about sacrifice? Does sacrifice change God?
6. What is the basic story of the Payment to the Devil theory?
7. What was the basic question the Payment to the Devil theory tries to answer? Is this still the basic question for people today?
8. What does it mean to you that there were, and always have been many different answers to the question of what Jesus does?
9. What does the author say is the main problem with these Anselm's and the Payment to the Devil theory? How is the story of the prodigal son different from either theory?
10. How would you feel and what would you do if you created a world and the creatures tried to take your place and became violent?
11. How does Jesus change the tradition of sacrifice? What does it mean that "Jesus is God's sacrifice to us"?
12. How does the author understand the phrase, "Jesus died for my sin"?
13. What does it mean that God joined humans in Jesus Christ?
14. If Jesus is how we see God working in our lives, what do we see?
15. Did the boy in the story know he could face the fact of his rape? How is God's grace always a surprise?

Chapter Seven: The Core of Christianity

1. What are the implications of the idea that the core of Christianity is that "God is committed to the world?"
2. Is this different from other summaries of the Christian faith?
3. What do you think is the proper place in Christianity for the promise of resurrection?
4. How do you view bodily, creaturely existence?
5. What would a faith community look like if it were to celebrate and join God in commitment to the world?
6. What would your life look like if you were to celebrate and join God in commitment to the world?

Chapter Eight: The Problem of Evil

1. What are the ways you have heard people answering the question, "Why is there pain, suffering, and evil in the world?"
2. What role does chance and risk play in the human freedom to choose?
3. How often do you attribute personal pain to God?
4. If you were Truman in the Truman Show, would you choose to leave the dome that had been your world or not? Why?
5. Were the German people worse morally than others, or are all people capable of such evil?
6. What are the signs of collective evil that you see in the world? Do we all participate in collective evil? If so, how?
7. Do you tend to respond to the reality of collective evil with guilt or helplessness? How could you better respond to it?
8. Where and when is the "Kingdom of God?" What is it?
9. In what ways did Jesus confront the collective evil of his day?
10. Have Jesus' followers always done the same? What are some examples of when they did?
11. How would you have written the paragraph "Being Human" differently?

Chapter Nine: About Being Human

1. Is the world worth hurting and risking for?
2. Are we supposed to make the world completely whole before we can have fun? Or is having fun doing meaningful work (and of course just playing) a part of making the world whole?
3. Does it take effort to live in a way different from the mainstream culture?
4. Does taking up our cross mean that we have no joy? What does it mean?
5. What might it mean to relax into God's love?
6. In what ways has our culture changed for the better? For the worse? What are some changes you might want to strive for?
7. In whose image are we made and how does that God appear to us in Jesus?
8. Is beginning to celebrate and join God in commitment to the world take a "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" kind of effort? Or does God begin the whole thing?
9. What can you begin to do tomorrow to celebrate and join God in love for the world (including yourself of course)?