

THIRTY THESES FOR THINKING (ABOUT)

Wedgewood Baptist Church

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The First Sunday in Christmas

I have modeled this sermon on Martin Luther's "five and ninety" although any of you familiar with those theses will recognize that Luther's are written in a distinctive disputational style. Our intent is the same, however, as I am putting forth my thoughts of the moment to stimulate discussion only. I do not intend these suggestions to be normative, but only to help us engage in a conversation about these matters. I know many of you will disagree with much of what I say, but I think that disagreement might be helpful to all of us in our growth. To paraphrase the old saying: "Some of you will disagree with all of these; all of you will disagree with some; and none of you will agree with all of them." I'm going to go through these rather quickly, give some of my thoughts on them (in italics below – I have not commented on all of them) and then I want to open the floor to your comments, additions, disagreements, etc. And we can continue our discussions after church at lunch also. Here goes...

God:

1. I am convinced of God's existence. Beyond that, I am agnostic.
2. God does not often, if ever, personally intervene in human affairs.

God is not in a pop tart box accessible for making us feel good or for favors or cures.

If we allow that God does so intervene, how would you explain all those who are not

"blessed" by cures and favors?

3. Wealth and health are not manifestations of God's blessing.

As with most things, test the premise by its opposite: are poverty and sickness God's curses

on people? If so, is that the type of god you'd want to worship? If wealth and health

are God's blessings, why would God withhold them from anyone?

4. I'm not sure about the concept of God as divine other.

I consider the possibility that God is somehow the Schleiermachean network of goodness that connects humankind but is greater than the sum of its parts – or perhaps there is some other concept of divinity that better describes God to us than the concept of God as something distant and apart from us?

5. Whatever God is, God does not have a penis.

“Father” is just a metaphor and an increasingly dysfunctional one. Askign for occasional use of inclusive language and metaphors is not as obsessive as the insistence that the father/masculine metaphor be normative or even exclusive.

6. Whatever God is, God is unique in divinity.

That is to say, I don't really think there are multiple gods or goddesses – just varying interpretations of our experiences of the divine.

7. If God has a will, it does not include children being killed by drunk drivers, people dying from cancer or earthquakes.

Jesus:

8. I believe that the incarnation of God in Jesus the Christ is a metaphor that gives birth to hope and is therefore salvific in nature.

Whether the incarnation story is a “fact” of history or, as I believe, a myth (albeit, a myth based on history), it tells us something about God and us that I think is important.

9. Jesus is uniquely divine but Jesus is not the only door to God.

Who Jesus is in history and salvation history is unlike anything or anyone else. But Jesus is not the only way to know God.

10. Because of my heritage and my own development, Jesus is my savior and I understand him

to be divine. That does not mean that the salvific nature of Jesus for me and mine excludes people of other faiths.

11. I believe that Jesus was fully human – he got angry, he got hungry, he got afraid, he got lonely, he got scared, he cried, he got annoyed, he was, at times, annoying.

Many people say that they believe Jesus was human but they don't mean it. They mean Jesus was some sort of first century, Jewish Mary Poppins – practically perfect in every way.

12. I believe that Jesus – being fully human – was also fully sexual.

It's only a corollary of the prior thesis, but I believe that it is important to point out that being human includes being sexual – sexuality is an integral part of being human.

Salvation:

13. Jesus did not have to die.

Jesus' death was a mistake – born of jealousy, power struggles, human evil, etc. God is not powerless. Death was not required for salvation. That type of belief is a remnant of ancient superstitions.

14. Salvation and reconciliation may be similar words if not synonyms.

I am still considering what I believe about salvation but I certainly don't believe it is salvation from hell. I think it may well be a seeking of peace – reconciliation to ourselves and others.

15. Salvation does not primarily mean “getting in to heaven” or “escaping hell”.

Life is not one long dress rehearsal for the “after life”.

16. Salvation is probably a gift entire given at God's volition (unless it is “reconciliation”).

There is nothing we have to do to deserve God's love. If salvation is some grace or gift, then

we don't have to earn it or even accept it.

Good and Evil:

17. There is no hell.

It is absolutely inconceivable to me that God could punish anyone eternally. I could never do something like that to my nephew – not even my own child. How could a God worth worshipping do so?

18. There is no devil.

Please!!! This remnant of Zoroastrianism is just an attempt to blame some nebulous third party for all the really evil things people do. For some reason, we feel better if we say the devil was responsible for the Holocaust rather than facing the powerful, painful truth of how inhumane humans can be.

19. I am convinced that evil is the work of humans – there is no acceptable scapegoat.

20. Because I believe evil is the work of humans, I find it hard not to believe that good is also the work of humans.

21. The human race is not doomed to live forever in a “rewards and punishments” milieu.

Why do Christians insist on being in spiritual adolescence – good is what we get rewarded for and evil is what we are punished for???

Prayer:

22. I'm not sure that a personal relationship is possible with a penpal. Any personal relationship with God or Jesus seems most likely through personal relationships with friends, acquaintances or just other folks.

I don't know what it means to say you have a "personal" relationship with a spirit.

23. Prayer is more likely to be heard by the divine in a dinner conversation with a friend than while kneeling at the front of a church building.

Ears, eyes, hands – all human attributes.

24. Prayer can be action.

Feeding the poor, holding a friend, walking in the rain, sex.

25. Prayer is not an alternative to medical care.

The practice of prayer may have good results but it is not because God swoops down and works a miracle on someone's kidney.

Scripture:

26. Scripture is not a treasure map by which one can find heaven.

27. Some scripture is inspired. But like Martin Luther and hordes of Baptists before me, I do not find it all to be even worth reading.

Take Numbers, for instance. Also, I think Revelation is probably on the bottom of my list.

28. The inspiration and authority to be found in scripture is seated in its revelation of the experience of others – individually or corporately – much the same as the inspiration and authority to be found in other writings.

29. Scripture was written, edited, copied and translated by hundreds and thousands of human beings and is just chug full of errors.

Miscellaneous:

30. Angels in scripture are communiqués from God. Modern "angels" are sappy sentimental

illusions, at best, and delusions, at worst.

[Discussion on the “theses” followed.]