

A friend - Sue Armentrout – describes the struggle to sainthood quite succinctly: “I have always been for peace, she says,” as in world peace – “I do hate war.”

Hating war is the easy part. Immediate peace is not so easy. Peace with others – people I know, my brothers and sisters and my extended family.

“I want to be a child of God, and I know I am, but now there is this hurdle, which is difficult to get past.”

Indeed – peace with those nearest.

I don't mind telling you, I find Jesus' parable about ten bridesmaids frustrating. The facts don't ring true.

Why are bridesmaids waiting for the groom and not the bride?

There is no bride in the story.

The wedding starts after midnight. Really? As my dad would have quipped, “nothing good happens after midnight!”

Five of the bridesmaids leave to purchase more oil. You have to wonder, what Jerusalem Wal Mart, is going to be open after midnight?

I see other problems, too – but my point is simple: the story is askew, like a dream, like you can't quite make sense of it. It is a Salvador Dali parable.

But wait, says the priest and writer, Robert Capon. The story contains two vital themes that are consistent in all of Jesus' stories.

With the bridegroom showing-up when least expected, you find the overarching theme that God is in control of history, that you can't predict history's trajectory or God or your life with God. This is exactly why Jesus admonishes, Stay Awake. Only Jesus does not mean, “Stay Awake, or Else ...” as in some threat, but simply: “You're going to want to see this!”

As in – with God, exciting things are in the offing.

The second overarching theme, or concept, is both intriguing and difficult. The story suggests that God is complicit in your life, when your plans go awry, even when bad things happen.

Maybe you've said this all along: God is to blame for life's failures and disappointments. You planned the wedding for 5 in the afternoon, but God doesn't show-up until after midnight.

I was reading the prophet Isaiah, this past week, and there it is – the same concept – in plain Hebrew:

“Yes, we have sinned, but our sin wouldn't have been so bad if God had not been so slow to act.”

Imagine that, Isaiah blaming God for the depth of the peoples' infidelities. Other prophets, too, treat God as conspirator. Hosea writes: “Let us return to the Lord; he has torn us, but now he will heal us.”

The point of this very difficult and complex concept Jesus and the prophets identify is not blame. Not the way you and I think of – as in – God is against me and causes dark and evil things to happen. Funny how our modern minds so quickly jump to blame. If we can blame someone else – God – then it mitigates our own role in our own crimes.

The point is not blame, but relationship. God cares enough about you and this tilted world of yours to maintain relationship with you. God cares enough to involve himself in your life, in the daily grit and grind.

And relationships are messy. In relationships, each person becomes both blessed by the other, and – if you will – affected by the other. Just like the farmer cannot farm without getting dirt under his fingernails, God cannot do her job without getting dirt under hers.

The dilatory bridegroom, who clearly represents God, bears some responsibility that the bridesmaids fell asleep, doesn't he? Had the bridegroom been on time, they would not have slept.

God like that is submerged in the day to day grit of your world, the dirt of your life. Tainted, dirt under God's fingernails.

Would you rather it be some other way? That God remain remote, the goodness of God inaccessible?

But God has appeared, and Jesus encourages you, “Stay awake. Keep tuned for more.” Act Two, or as Paul Harvey would say, “the rest of the story!” You have experienced the beginning only, and not the end.

Just when you thought you had been abandoned, you were recovered. Just when you realized you were lost, you were found.

Stay awake.

All Saints Day was originally the day set aside for people to remember and honor those people who performed extraordinary and often inhuman feats. They were saints, after all.

Over time, the day has come to represent the day for literally all saints – ordinary people – you and me, trying to live our lives extraordinarily.

The problem with sainthood is the dirt of our relationships, as Sue Armentrout pointed out. Learning peace with those who are closest.

Yes, God, but others, too.

God – so many people feel estranged from God because they just don't get God. They do not understand, cannot comprehend a God lovingly at work, for to them, all they see is evidence to the contrary. They see the complicity of God, but don't understand that God is complicit because God cares so much.

This is the first law of the nature of God: God is absolute, complete, and undeniable love. You are loved, and that alone is why you can hope.

Others – we must learn peace. We must recover the Eden art of laying down sword and picking-up ploughshares. Meaning - we must yield to others.

In all aspects of life: religiously, politically, philosophically, in families, marriages, churches.

You set aside right to honor the other. To honor God in the other.

An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when night ends, and day begins.

One student answered, "Perhaps when you see a distant animal, and can tell it is a sheep and not a dog."

"No," said the rabbi.

Another student answered, "When you look at a tree and can tell it is a fig and not a peach."

Again the rabbi said, "No."

"When is it?" demanded the pupils.

To which the rabbi answered, "It is when you can look at the face of any woman or man and see that it is your sister or brother. If you cannot see this, it is still night."