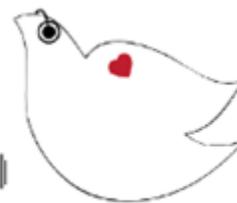


Dunker Punks Podcast



Transcription details:

Episode Number: 82

Episode Name: Holy Noticers

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Episode Description: There are many images of Christianity in fantastic stories that we love to immerse ourselves in for fun! This week we welcome a new contributor, Christa Craighead, as she explores some of these connections and how God is also present in the mundane.

Speakers in audio file:

S1: Dana Cassell

S2: Christa Craighead

Transcription:

Dana: Hey Dunker Punks, you listen to us all the time on the podcast. But now, we wanna hear from you. Will you help us out with the future of the show by taking a survey? You can direct your browser to bit.ly/dppsurvey. Go on, you can do it right now before you listen to this show. Click the link, take the survey, and you will have our eternal thanks.

[fantasy themed music]

Hey Dunker Punks. Are you a fan of The Lord of the Rings? How about Harry Potter? Star Wars? The Marvel universe? Maybe, like me, you are total invested in N. K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy? Whether you're a fan of fantasy or science fiction, or not, there are probably some stories like the ones I named that have shaped you and your faith. What are your favorites?

[transition into intro music]

In this episode, we welcome a new contributor to the Dunker Punks podcast. Christa Craighead, a student at Bridgewater College. Christa shares about how Sam, from The Lord of the Rings, became an example for her, of what she calls 'Holy Noticing'. Sometimes we can get caught up in assuming that God is only present in those mountaintop moments of faith. You know what I'm talking about. We're sort of prone to forgetting about God when things are humming along in their everyday monotony. But Christa invites us to consider how God might

be present in the boring, in the plain, and in the simple parts of life, too. As you listen, I invite you to think a little bit about where you've seen God lately, [background music begins] in moments that might be considered...mundane.

[music fades as Christa starts talking]

Christa: If you are a fan of The Lord of the Rings trilogy, then you know that the main character in that entire series of books is Sam Gamgee. You also know that the plot of the books is basically the travels of these two Hobbits, who come in possession of a cursed ring, and they have to take it into the dark lord's lands, and destroy it. I say that Sam Gamgee is the main character because, even though Frodo Baggins is the one tasked with destroying the ring, and even though the story really focuses on Frodo's life a lot more than Sam's, Sam is the character who constantly reminds Frodo Baggins that there is hope. Even when the journey seems impossibly dark, even when it seems like there is no hope to be found anywhere at all. Even when readers are positive that Frodo and Sam will not make it, Sam is able to inspire everyone.

Sam reminds us all that good things are always just around the corner, and that nothing is ever quite as dark, or as scary, or as hopeless as it may seem. I am a fan of this book series mainly because it speaks to me on a spiritual level. At a point in my life, couple of years ago where I didn't really feel a connection to God or the Spirit at all, this series of books reminded me that God was always around me. That God was always present. Sometimes just beyond the cloud cover.

There's a particular scene in the last book in the series, where Frodo and Sam are in a land of perpetual darkness, basically the dark lord's land of Mordor. And while they're in this land, they take shelter in a cave for the night. And Frodo, at this point in the book, is feeling particularly defeated. But then the scene comes up where Sam wanders out of the cave, and he looks up at the sky, where it's covered in clouds, and he sees, peeking through the clouds, this bright ray of light. And he really isn't sure what it is at first, but as he looks up and as he studies it, he realizes, it's the light of a star. And this is not supposed to happen in the land of Mordor. This is the dark lord's territory. No light is supposed to enter at all. But somehow, beyond all hope and beyond all reason, there is a break in the clouds. And the light fills Sam with hope, and he goes back into the cave to wake up Frodo, and basically encourages him to finish the journey. And spoiler alert if you haven't read the book series yet, they do end up completing the mission; beyond all hope and beyond all doubt.

Currently, as I'm talking to you, as I'm making this podcast, I'm sitting outside the steps of my house. And spring is here, so the birds are singing, flowers are blooming in the yard, there's a soft breeze blowing right now, but it's not cold. Trees are starting to bloom again all around me. In these moments, where I see and I feel and I smell and I sense all of this beauty, it is so clear to me, that God exists. My connection with God has been recreated. Because, on my own spiritual journey, I've come to the point of understanding, that God does not exist as a man sitting up in the clouds far away from my reach. God is present all around me. And for a time, I believed, as I still do, that God was present in all of the beautiful moments. The birds singing. The soft, warm breeze. The flowers in the yard. A fresh, white, beautiful smell. A sunrise or a sunset, sometimes that brings a tear to your eye. Yes, God exists in all of those beautiful moments.

Just like Sam Gamgee reminds us in The Lord of the Rings. That God exists in the beauty of the stars. In the light that shines through in the darkness. That is God. And what a powerful

message that is. That in the darkest of times, God still exists all around us. In the beauty that remains. But, this message to you today is not about how God exists in the beautiful things. Yes, it is true that God resides in the beauty. But I think if we push ourselves a little beyond that thought, that God exists only in the beauty, we can start to think about how God does not just exist in the moving, powerful moments. But how God, the Spirit, exists and moves in everyday, ordinary, boring, small moments, as well. Sam Gamgee, in *The Lord of the Rings*, he reminds us all that God is that beautiful, powerful thing. Just as I sit here, outside in my porch and I sense that all of the goodness in the world, and the beauty, is the Spirit. Because it definitely is, but more than that, beyond that thought. God is literally the air that we breathe in and out of our lungs. God exists in the dirty pile of dishes that is in my kitchen sink right now. God exists in the chair that is in the corner of my living room. If we're going to think of God as all-powerful, we have to move beyond the idea that God only exists in the beautiful, big, powerful things.

When we think of the expanse of God's power, how far the Spirit reaches, we have to understand, and this is where I am in my own spiritual journey, we have to understand that God's reach goes far beyond just the powerful. To be truly powerful, to be truly all-encompassing, to really be bigger than all belief, we have to believe and become conscious of the fact that God is existing in every moment, all the time, all around us. Even in the moments that are really boring. Even in the objects that don't really serve a purpose for us in our every-day, immediate lives. Yes, God does exist in the beautiful. But, God also exists in the plain and in the boring, and in the not-so-moving moments of our lives, as well.

The book of Kings, chapter 19 verse 11, tells the story of Elijah when he's fleeing from his persecutors and he's seeking out God. He flees to a cave, where he's waiting for the Spirit of God to pass by. This is where verse 11 picks up. "The Lord said, go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and a powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But, the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake came a great fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face, and went out and stood on the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'what are you doing here, Elijah?'"

I love this story in the book of Kings. Because, I think it resonates a lot with Sam Gamgee's story in *The Lord of the Rings*. Sam Gamgee is also looking for the Spirit. Looking for some sign of hope in the darkest of times. Elijah feels a real, literal connection to God. God is literally speaking to Elijah throughout the entire story, telling Elijah to go out and to wait for the Lord to pass by. So as Elijah is waiting, these three huge things pass by the cave: a wind, an earthquake, and a fire. And the scriptures say that God was not in any of those things. I don't think the scripture means that the Spirit of God was not existent within those things, because we know that God, the Spirit, exists in all things. But the scripture goes on to say, that it was not in those things that Elijah sensed the presence of the Lord. It came later on. When a soft breeze blows by. Like a gentle whisper. And in that gentle whisper, that is where Elijah most clearly sees God. Elijah knows that that whisper is where God is waiting to speak with him.

I think this story is so relevant to any of us. If you're like me, and you're at the stage on your spiritual journey, where you're trying to understand in what capacity God actually does exist, I think it's important for us to become like Elijah. To become 'Holy Noticers' like Elijah. When I say 'Holy Noticer' I mean, just like Elijah, we see God, not just in the beautiful, not just in the powerful, not just in the big, magnificent things that move us to tears and change our lives.

What I mean is that like Elijah, we take the time to sit, and to listen, and to think. And to become aware and actively conscious of the Spirit existing in all things around us. Not just in the birds singing outside, not just in the warm spring breeze, but in the dirty pile of dishes that's sitting in our sinks. In the crack in the sidewalk. In the dead grass in the yard. And yes, even in that chair that is sitting in the corner of our houses that we hardly ever take the time to sit in.

May you practice the spiritual consciousness. May you practice being a 'Holy Noticer' like Elijah. [background music starts] May you see God in the beauty, like Sam Gamgee. But may you also realize that God exists in the boring, in the plain, in the simple, in the mundane, in the ordinary parts of our lives as well. May you always remember that God's power, that the expanse and the reach of God is so vast, it goes far beyond just the big and mighty and earth-shaking moments.

[background music continues as Dana speaks]

D: Scripture is full of reminders that God shows up just as much in the ordinary stuff of life as She does in the spectacular events. For example, listen to Psalm 19: "Heaven is declaring God's glory. The sky is proclaiming God's handiwork. One day gushes the news to the next. One night informs another what needs to be known. Of course, there's no speech, no words, their voices can't be heard, but their sound extends throughout the world. Their words reach the ends of the earth. God has made a tent in Heaven for the sun. The sun is like a groom coming out of its honeymoon suite, like a warrior it thrills at running its course. It rises in one end of the sky, its circuit is complete at the other, nothing escapes its heat."

I love that image. The skies proclaim God's handiwork. The very ordinary flow of day into night into day into night, etcetera is also a testament to God's presence and care. Every moment, every aspect, every joy and every frustration we encounter is shot through with God's presence and God's gift.

I've been thinking about what Christa asked of us, to become 'Holy Noticers'. And as I've tried to be more attentive to God's presence in the mundane and boring parts of life, I did notice a couple things that I'd been walking on by. The first one is that, there's this giant crabapple tree that fills the living room window in my apartment. It makes where I live feel like a treehouse, really. And over the course of the last couple weeks, that tree bloomed into an explosion of pale, pink flowers. And then there were these spring breezes, and rains, and they shook all the petals loose, and they became showers of beauty out the window. And then those blooming flowers were replaced with tender, green, spring leaves. And that entire process took, like, 2 weeks, maybe 2 and a half weeks, and it was incredible. But if that tree hadn't been right there in that window, I would have missed it all.

And I also started to notice some of the simple and plain and boring work that other people were doing all around me. I noticed that, I have this friend who coordinates our book club meetings. She sends out monthly reminders, and keeps track of every book we've read, she keeps us on par. And it's so important, and helpful. And a little image of God's constant presence. And then I noticed church members who are always attentive to those details that I tend to forget. You know, like making sure there are fresh flowers on the windowsills in our building, or, importantly, and really bad, when we all forget it, making sure there's enough toilet paper in the closet. There's so much about the world, the specific world where I live and work and play that I just usually walk right by and ignore. I'm grateful for this reminder to become a 'Holy Noticer'.

Where can you bring the power of holy noticing to your life? Is there a pile of dirty dishes in your kitchen sink begging for some divine attention? Is there a to-do list filled with opportunities to encounter God's presence today? How will you become a 'Holy Noticer'? Where will you see the world declaring God's glory?

[change to fantasy background music]

The Dunker Punks podcast is created by a host of Holy Noticers, who are committed to paying attention to God at work in the world. We'd love to have you join us, email us at dpp@arlingtoncob.org or find us on social media. Today's episode was created by Christa Craighead and edited by Jacob Crouse. I'm Dana Cassell, one of your hosts. Susanne Lay is our executive producer. Kerrick van Asselt makes all those awesome graphic shareables you see, and Dean Feasenhiser is creating transcripts of each show. You know, in case you want to quote any of our incredible contributors on your blog, in your sermon, or on social media. The Arlington Church of the Brethren holds space for this entire project to live, and grow.

Until next time, Dunker Punks, go out there and be Holy Noticers.