

## *Believing in an Unreasonable and Unruly God*

*Good afternoon, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Margaret, and I am a senior religion major.*

*I am always amazed by people who can think their way into religious belief; people who can use their minds to come to see that God exists. I think that if I had to think my way into faith I would be an atheist.*

*I love the Quaker term, "convinced," because that is exactly what I have been. My faith comes from a resounding, indescribable experience of the presence of God. There is nothing reasonable, describable or comprehensible about the God that I know. My knowledge of God is an emotional one, driven by experiences that have left me with no other choice but to believe. I realized this summer that I would make a terrible Methodist, because when I am in church, I laugh, I cry, I dance I FEEL, I don't think. ☺*

*God isn't simply unreasonable because my religious experience isn't cranial.*

**[PAUSE]**

***I once heard a very wise preacher say that the more she studied religion and the more she grew in her faith the less she knows, and now when her congregation comes to her with questions about why the Bible says what it does and why God does what God does, she answers, “Honey, I don’t know!”***

***I find that this is true for me as well. When I was younger I thought I could see for myself how God did things in the world, and I somehow thought that God hand would also be visible, and that the path God set for me would also be straight and clear. As I have gotten older, I have begun to live my life in varying shades clueless and confused. I don’t know, I don’t understand, and I can’t really make sense. I can feel, my heart can know, and I can change.***

***God isn’t the only thing that I have been less able to reason my way around as I have gotten older. Several summers ago I worked full time for a hospice in New York. I worked with a child psychologist to design a summer program for teenagers who were grieving over the loss of a parent or a sibling. I***

*learned quickly that there is nothing that you can say to a grieving teenager that will in anyway be adequate and there is no way to know what each individual goes through as they struggle with loss.*

*Tragedy, pain, grief, violence, sickness, death, these are things that are hard to even think about, let along understand in the context of an all-loving and omnipotent God.*

*I would like to share with you now a section from the Hebrew scriptures, as they are envisioned by Eugene Peterson in “The Message.” This is the story of a dude, Job, who was faced with some of the toughest struggles of humanity, and had to try and understand them in the context of God:*

***[MOTION TO READERS]***

*Job does not always stay pure in heart or committed to God (I mean, how could he really), much later on in the book of Job we hear this:*

***[MOTION TO SECOND READER]***

*Just to be clear, I don't believe in the devil, and I don't think that God would will evil on a human being in order to prove God's*

*power, but I do think there is an important message in the story of Job. Shit Happens. I don't mean to be flippant, and I am not talking about losing your keys, or getting stuck in traffic, I am talking about tragedy.*

*As some of you know, I spent the summer working with a Pastor of a small church in an urban inner city area. Part of what I did for the church was staff their front office. The church practices radical Christian hospitality, and part of the way that we lived that out, was by having an open door policy. The church was a sanctuary, and we would take anyone who came through our doors and try as hard as we could to meet their needs. Truthfully most of the people who came through our doors just needed a safe and cool place to sit.*

*I remember some people in particular. One woman came in with a little three year old girl, and a one month old baby. She explained to me that she needed diapers, food, and an internet connection so that she could find an apartment. She was living with a friend, because he boyfriend had been beating her and she was worried for the safety of her children.*

*Another woman came in with a huge gaping cut in her leg. She wanted the pastor to bandage her up, and since Sue (the pastor of the church) was out for the day, I did it. The woman had no health insurance and was not able to collect her government aid because her live-in boyfriend had tried to run her over with his car.*

*A man came into the church because he wanted to attend bible study, after meeting a number of times with the pastor of the church he began attending, but I was informed that for safety reasons the church staff (including me), had to make sure there was someone with him at all times on Sunday. He was a convicted child molester, and had been asked to leave the previous church he had attended.*

*The church had several free meal programs and one week I was serving food on a sunny Saturday afternoon. A girl who was probably around 12 came and asked me if she could take extra food home with her for her family. She had been beaten, and one of her eyes was entirely swollen shut, and she had huge dark bruises all over her arms, legs and face.*

*I had hoped that over this summer I would be able to learn some of what goes into pasturing, and I did. I learned that speaking gently and kindly is essential, that feeding, clothing, respecting those who are in need is the work of Christ, and that preaching on Sunday is probably only about 1% of what a Pastor does.*

*However, I think the most important things I learned were about suffering. There is no comforting words that can be spoken, no way to fix or make right the suffering that human beings inflict upon each other. There is no response, because there can be no way to understand. Perhaps I am just young and ignorant, but if there is a way to fully understand the things that break our hearts, I have not yet learned it.*

*This process of thought could lead to hopeless, unhappy apathy, but I think that would be a sin.*

*For me, this is where God in all of God's crazy, unruly, unpredictable unreasonableness comes in. I cannot begin to even understand all of the pain in the world,*

*let alone comfort all who need help. I have no answers, no wisdom, no power, what I do have is an unshakable knowledge of the Endless Stream of God's Love and Joy.*

*What I do know is that God is beyond me, beyond what I can do or understand, outside of what I can write about in a paper, discuss in a class or test in a laboratory*

*And this gives me hope.*

*I have come to realize that God lives in that place, where the brain ends and the world begins.*