



Transgressive God

Ken Tanner

Our transgressive God brushes arms with an agent of larcenous Rome as they dip bread from the same bowl of olive oil.

God leans into a woman, listening; places his arm around the penitent's shoulders as she pours out the secrets of her heart.

This ease at table with sinners does not sit well with those who mistake God for someone who keeps a record of wrongs on an invisible slate, eager to cancel some persons altogether.

The offended confront Jesus about his table manners and in reply he tells them a story. When God tells a story about God to help us understand his story with us, it does not matter whether it happened in history or not, because he is making the sort of world he wants by the sort of story he tells us.

We all know this story: A father had two sons. Both want what belongs to the father (though one is far more brash about it), and couldn't care less if the father is dead or alive. The father loves his sons and all that is his is theirs but they are blind to his adoration.

The younger son grasps

for his inheritance, takes it as possession rather than receive it as gift in good time, and walks away from the country of love into the country of death. Trying to preserve his life by pleasure, he loses it in accelerated fashion.

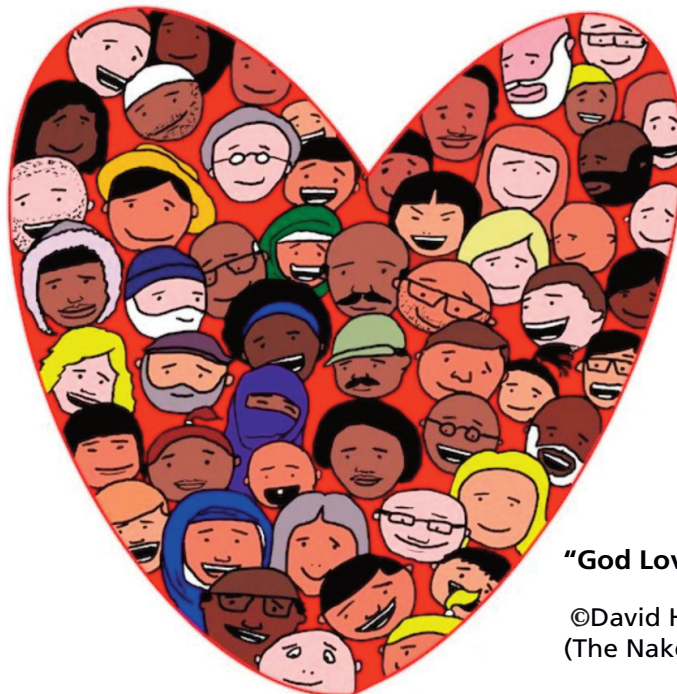
When this younger son comes to his senses and makes his way home, the father sees him returning from afar.

The father runs to him, throws his arms around his neck and kisses him (kisses the one who wished him dead); then barely lets the son get his confession out before he puts a robe on his back and a ring on his finger, slays the fatted calf, and throws a party where all are welcome.

The elder brother wants nothing to do with this reconciliation and angrily refuses to enter the party and sit at the table. This does not change the desire of the father to have both sons—all of his sons and daughters—at the table with him.

One imagines Paul has this story about God and the world God wants in his heart when he tells the Corinthians that those who follow this boundary-transgressive God no longer judge anyone by what "they seem to be," for God has set a table at which Jesus Christ is the measure of every human. □

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"God Loves Everyone"

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