

Mercy Embodied/Embodied Mercy as Justice, Wisdom and Holiness

Pptx2 [Ppt – refers to the movement forward on the accompanying Powerpoint presentation] Fire cast on the Earth kindling....a theme which has woven its way through all of our papers, is an evocative and also a frightening theme. Within recent weeks, we have seen the incredible power of fire to devastate the **Ppt** earth itself and **Ppt** our human constructions. There is a power associated with fire that gives us pause so that we stand reverently in relation to it. We have been gathered by this power of God, the Fiery Spirit. We are asking: what is the power of mercy which is being cast into our midst that needs to race through the injustices, the complacencies, the negative powers at work in our world that we grappled with yesterday. There is also an intimacy and a warmth associated with fire – **Ppt** it gathers us around it, we tell stories and remember, and it captures our gaze drawing us into reflection and contemplation.

Ppt We have each told different stories, different nuances of our story of mercy from different parts of the globe. In my paper, I drew attention to the layers upon layers of iteration of mercy imaged as fire cast on the earth kindling. The image which captures these iterations on iterations for me and which I want to draw into our reflection is that of the Mandelbrot set. It is a mathematical formula designed to explicate a foundational ordering principle in the universe, related in fact to the fractal imaging with which many of you will be familiar. Mercy is like the set, the small cat-like figure that explodes into myriads of iterations. We have heard and will continue to hear a number of these as our theologizing continues.

The focus which I gave in my paper was that of mercy embodied or incarnated in Jesus. As I read the papers, listened for what was reflected in them, and have now listened to our reflections and our deliberations yesterday, the two aspects of mercy, the mercy of God embodied in Jesus, which I want to highlight is that of **Pptx2** *passion*, the passion symbolized in the catching fire, the enkindling, and that of **Ppt** *pain*, the searing fire in one's being in the face of the contemporary injustices explored yesterday: passion and pain.

The passion of the God of mercy is captured in its rich manifestation in the metaphor of womb compassion in Exodus 34:6. The God who reveals God's self with passion to Moses on Sinai is a **Ppt** God of womb compassion or mercy. But this passion is such that *rachamim* must be iterated through other language also. **Pptx3** Passion/womb compassion is nuanced in terms of *chanun* or graciousness/showing mercy graciously [remember the gratitude which Janet read as a face of mercy]. **Pptx3** *Chesed* too is associated with mercy/compassion carrying the connotations of *steadfast love*, the love associated with the covenant [the steadfastness we have seen around the globe as we have encountered our story]. **Pptx3** *Emet* or faithfulness also circles around the *racham* of God carrying the notion of fidelity. These attributes inform one another, circle one another or move with one another in a spiral of meaning so that when we encounter one, the other/s can be implied or evoked. [A number of the texts on the first page of the sheet I have given you captures these iterations of womb compassion]

It is this same passion/compassion that the Matthean author captures in the exclamation of 9:36: when Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them/was

moved in the bowels or depths of his being, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. The *rachamim* of God is embodied in Jesus and made tangible and visible in his ministry. In the first part of Matthew's gospel, this ministry is **Ppt** his preaching, teaching, and healing brought to our attention by 4:23 and 9:35 which parallel one another and frame Jesus' *preaching/teaching* in the Sermon on the Mount [Matt 5-7] and his *healing* in 8-9. These same ministries have been the embodiment of Mercy in the congregation Catherine founded as it spread out across the globe – going to all nations as the final Matthean gospel command projects [Matt 28:19]. Jesus, embodied *rachamim/mercy*, has impelled Catherine, Frances Warde, Jessie Ripoll and all their companions in mercy down through the one hundred and seventy-six years of the congregation's history.

Turning now to the pain of God and of Jesus, the pain which belongs to the womb compassionate one, I recall the short text of Sandra Schneiders who says that the religious like the prophet “hears the cry of the poor near to the heart of God”. This same prophetic religious will hear not only the cry of the poor but the pain in the heart of God [the pain that seared our souls yesterday]. Jeremiah experienced this and could exclaim: **Ppt** With the wound of my poor people is my heart wounded, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me [Jer 8:21]. Jesus knew this same pain as he lamented “Jerusalem, Jerusalem”, giving us the wonderful image of mercy, the hen gathering her brood protectively under her wings [Matt 23:37]. This same pain is manifest in the heart of Mary of Bethany, as I indicated in my paper, as she and her family place themselves in danger as they host Jesus whom they all know is wanted by the authorities and as she with radical embodiment pours healing ointment over the feet of Jesus and caresses those feet with her hair, touching the one in pain. It is manifest too in Justa, the Canaanite woman, whose pain impelled her to contend with Jesus until he learnt a new level of compassion and in the woman who pours healing ointment over the head of Jesus in a house in Bethany, manifesting in her pain at the approaching death of her companion and friend that she has learnt from Jesus both the pain and the passion of mercy. It is manifest today in the pain in the heart of each of us here as we encounter the injustices articulated in our papers and encountered in our lives.

Ppt What I have been able to evoke from our vast and rich biblical tradition in one short paper and one short presentation is miniscule. These and other texts will, however, resonate through and be evoked by our theologizing during these days. They will be intertwined with the story of Catherine, with the stories of our foremothers in mercy and with the cries and the pain, the joys and the sufferings rising up from our world today. Together they will form and shape into a rich tapestry that will hold the one and the many, of God who is communion, of Jesus who is incarnate/embodied and of mercy manifest through the women and now also the men who place themselves within the family, the community the ambit of Catherine and of mercy into the twenty-first century.

I intended leaving this image of the Mandelbrot set as my symbol but since arriving I have received a precious gift which I want to share with you. It is a cross which is green in colour but which has a red inset. It spoke to me of the passion of our universe, our planet and the pain that not only we, but the planet also bears. Of this symbol the artist says: *The cross speaks of the radical collision of the Divine and the*

human. Intersecting arms embrace all of creation in unrelenting love. Dare we live our lives in the light of this fierce love?

Elaine Wainwright

11.11.07

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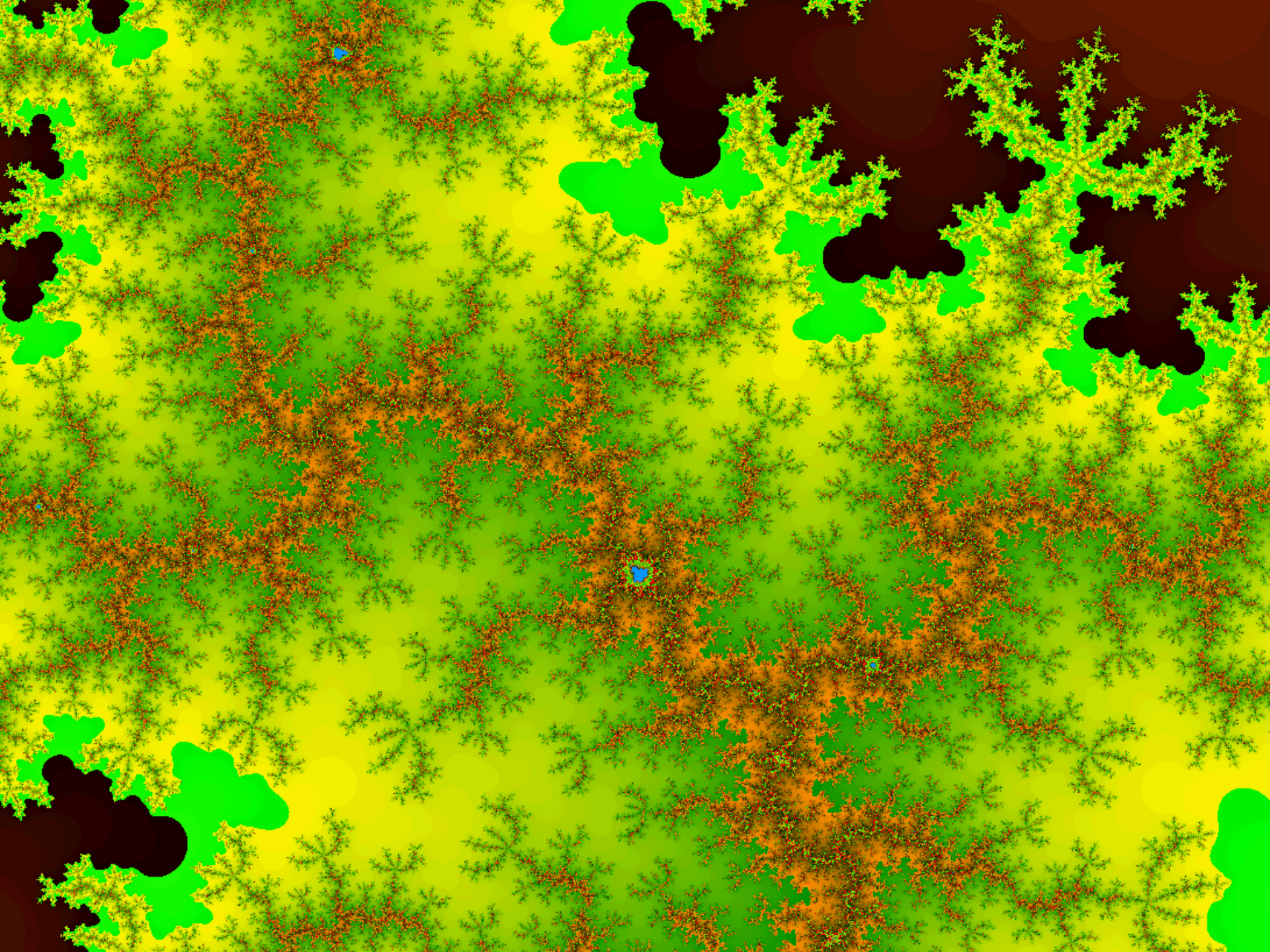
Justice, Wisdom and Holiness







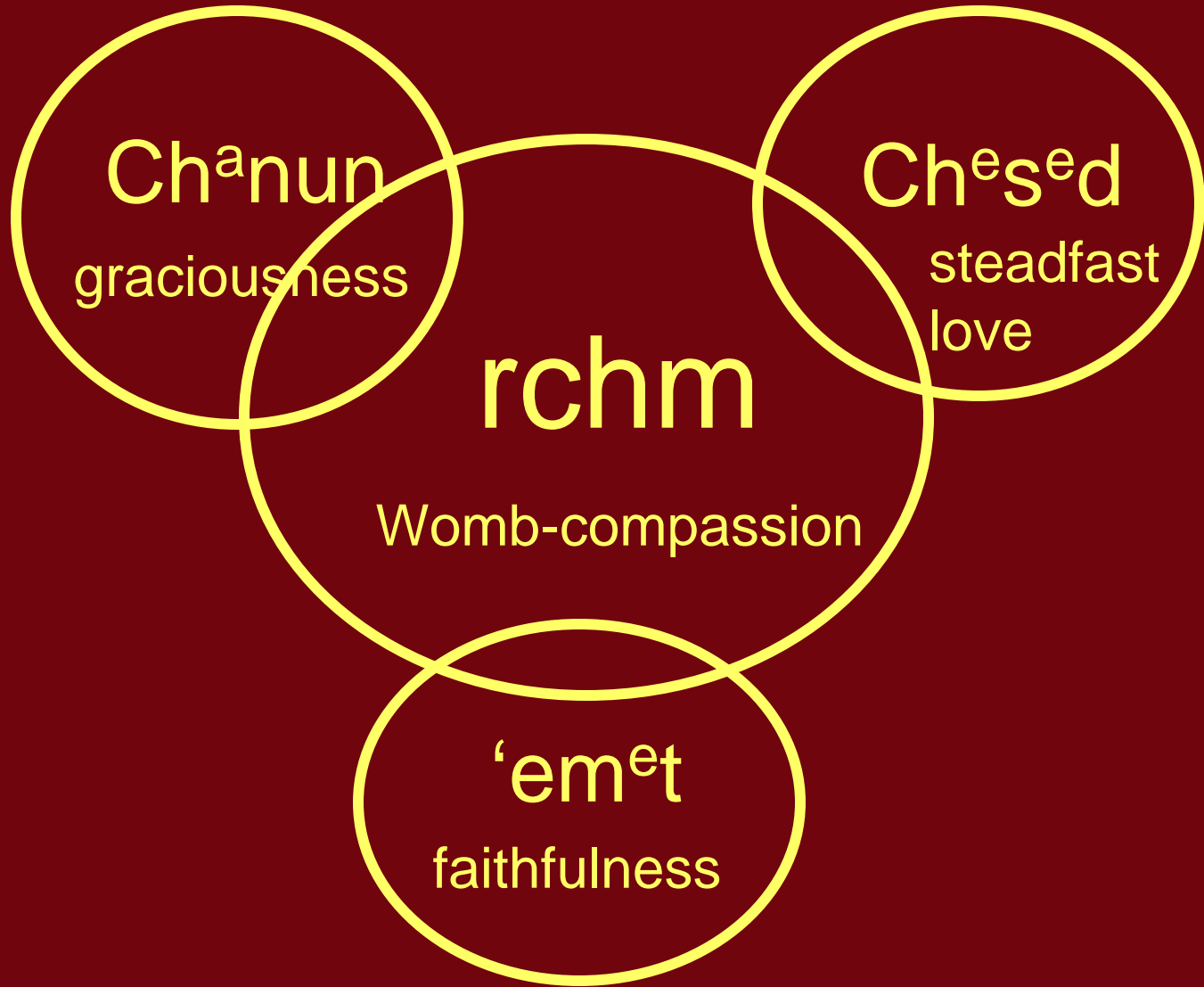






Passion

Pain



4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, **teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and *healing* every disease and every sickness among the people.**

5 - 7: Sermon on the Mount

8 - 9: Healing Narratives

9:35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, **teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and *healing* every disease and every sickness.**



With the wound of my people

is my heart wounded

Jer 8:21



