

A person is seen from behind, standing in a desert canyon and looking up at the night sky through a natural rock arch. The Milky Way galaxy is visible in the sky, and the canyon walls are illuminated with warm, orange light. The text "Meeting God In Our Busy Lives" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font, and the subtitle "The theology and practice of Zimzum" is overlaid in a smaller, white, italicized serif font.

Meeting God In Our Busy Lives

The theology and practice of Zimzum

The Rt. Rev. Phil LaBelle

Opening Prayer

O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen. ~ BCP 833

We Begin at Creation

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”

Genesis 1:1-2 (NRSV)



A Second Way to Read This

“When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

Genesis 1:1-2 (NRSVUE)



Zimzum Enters the Chat

- Moltmann borrows an idea from 16th century Jewish mystic Isaac Luria
- *Zimzum* and *Shekinah*
- Self-withdrawal in order to make space
- Also spelled tsimtsum, tzimtzum, or zinzum,

God's First Act is One of Love

- God withdraws Godself from a space within Godself in order to make creation possible.
- “God’s creative activity outward is preceded by this humble divine self-restriction.... God’s creative love is grounded in this humble, self-humiliating love.”
- God creates by making room, and this is best brought out through motherly categories.
- God withdraws to create a type of womb within Godself into which the cosmos can be birthed — but this creation is not *outside* of God.

The Impact of *Zimzum*

- Our understanding of Creation shifts from a show of power to self-giving love
- Creation remains within and surrounded by God
- Implications for us as the bearers of God's image

Zimzum and The Image of God

- If God's first act was zimzum—an act of love in making space for the other—we are called to do so too.
- God would not have embraced zimzum if God did not want to be in relationship with all of creation.
- “Human life is necessarily life in community” and founded on love. (Moltmann)
- God's image reflected in loving relationships, in justice and in sacrificial living.
- Make space in our busy lives for God, others, and the natural world.

Zimzum and The Image of God

- If God's first act was *zimzum*—an act of love in making space for the other—we are called to do so too.
- God would not have embraced *zimzum* if God did not want to be in relationship with all of creation.
- “Human life is necessarily life in community” and founded on love. (Moltmann)
- God's image reflected in loving relationships, in justice and in sacrificial living.
- Make space in our busy lives for God, others, and the natural world.

How Do We Find Space?

- Study in 2019 US residents checked phones 96 times per day (once every 10 minutes)
- In 2022, increased 4-fold to 352 times a day (once every 3 minutes)
- 2-4 hours a day “tapping, typing, swiping on devices” — 2,600 daily touches.
- UCal Study, once distracted by email, text, or other notifications average of 23 minutes to refocus
- 71% of Americans check phone within 10 minutes of waking up

How Do We Find Space?

- Commandment to honor the Sabbath.
- “The Hebrew noun ‘Sabbath’ is related to *shabat*, meaning ‘to cease, stop, interrupt’... Such interruptions [in the daily routine] open up space in time for us to remember, to redirect our lives to what is true and good, and to regain perspective.” —Theologian Dennis Olson
- “When time is reduced to money, the Sabbath becomes unaffordable.” Prof. Ruy Costa

Making Space in Our Busy Lives

- “Sabbath is the holy time when we feast, play, dance, have sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness.” Theologian Dan Allender
- And yet, few people choose to participate in the sabbath “because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week.”
- “The celebration of the sabbath leads to an intensified capacity for perceiving the loveliness of everything—food, clothing, the body and soul—because existence itself is glorious.” Moltmann

Reflection for 10 Minutes

- How does this idea of Creation change your understanding of God, if at all?
- If love and not power is foundational in creation, what might this say to us about our lives?
- Where might your life be too full, thus limiting you or your own creativity?
- How might we embrace *zimzum*—making intentional space in our lives— in our very anti-*zimzum* world?

The Spiritual Practice of Thinning



Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BCP, 827