

God in the Everyday

Take several deep breaths, slowly in and out. Feel the breath, experience the air. You may want to hold your hand in front of your mouth and feel the air. [pause]

Genesis 2:7 – Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Man is universal in its naming here; male and female hold the breath of God.

We are all God breathed. God is with us all the time; God does not stay contained in a certain place, or in certain people. We were in the beginning created out of the dirt, the lowest of materials, and we were just that—a lump of clay—until God, the God of the universe, breathed into the first lump God’s breath, and there was life.

One of my favorite quotes from [Teilhard de Chardin] is “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” We walk around with God’s breath pulsating within us. We are spiritual people. The challenge to us is to show up, pay attention, to notice, to be curious about what the Spirit is telling us or revealing to us.

There is nothing wrong with reading our Bibles everyday or however much you read, or praying for hours, or going to conferences about spiritual matters, learning about the holiness of God, the forgiving love of Jesus, or the guiding light of the Spirit. In fact these activities and many more are great ways to learn about God, God’s promises and provisions. But what I believe we all really long for is to experience God, to know God, to communicate with God, to hear God. We can read about, talk about, theologize about, theorize about where God is in the everyday, but what we really need to do is **stop** reading the menu, when what we really want is to eat the meal—tasting God, experiencing God.

Barbara Brown Taylor says in her book, *An Altar in the World*, “What is saving my life now is the conviction that there is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experiences of human life on earth. My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to set God apart from real life in the real world.”

When Jesus served the disciples during the Passover feast, he said as he gave them bread and wine, "Drink ...," "eat ..."—do this in remembrance of me. They took it into their bodies. They smelled, they tasted, they swallowed. Jesus could have said, "See this bread and wine. It symbolizes me. Remember me." But no, Jesus used the everyday events like eating and drinking and used everyday food like bread and wine to teach what he wanted them believe. Instead of telling them how to wash each other's feet, he stooped down and got wet. **He** became a servant, holding in his hands the feet that had accumulated the dirt and dust of the road. It was a bodily knowing. It is to experience God.

Jesus also used mud and spit, loaves and fishes to heal and feed. God is in the everyday.

So seeing God in the everyday requires no study in theology, expensive equipment, any superior aptitude or knowledge or special company. What we find difficult to embrace is that we already have everything we need. The only thing missing is our consent to be where we are.

So I propose that we first of all:

1. Show up!

You might say this should be easy, because here I am, I'm awake. What else do you want? There is the story about the disciple who once asked his master whether there was anything he could do to make himself grow spiritually. To which the master replied, "As little as you can do to make the sun rise in the morning." Disconcerted, the disciple asked, "What then is the use of the spiritual exercises you taught me?" To which the master replied, "To make sure you are not asleep when the sun begins to rise." It's called showing up.

I remember trying to explain something to my children and asking them to look me in the eyes while I spoke to them. They were there in body, but unless they looked at me they were not yet with me. You have all experienced this with a child, spouse, or friend.

It is to be curious about the encounters of our lives, to ask the question, "Where is God in this?" Can we believe that God is in trip to the grocery store, working in your garden, or working in the office?

After an intense conversation with Sheldon this week, the thought went through my head, "Where is God in this?"

To believe that God can be revealed in something as uncomfortable as a toothache, a surgery, a difficult diagnosis, even a death, takes eyes that are looking deeper than the circumstance at hand. And frankly, to see God in

some of these events takes eyes that look long and hard. And even then answers are not always easy to come by, and maybe there will never be an answer that makes sense to us.

The story of Moses that was read about this morning is one where Moses was about his life, doing what he needed to do, herding sheep. It was his work. The reason Moses was in Midian was because he had fled from Egypt after murdering an Egyptian and was found out; not a particularly noble thing to do—the murder or the running away. God pursued a murderer. Moses encounters God in his normal daily activity. You will notice that God did not speak to Moses until he turned aside, he noticed, he showed up. The conversation between God and Moses was not an easy one—God was beginning the journey of taking his children out of bondage, and Moses was going to a major player in that process. God did something extraordinary to get Moses' attention, but Moses had to show up.

So how do we show up? For sure it is the times when we do the disciplines of meditation, reading, praying, asking God for wisdom and guidance. One could call these moments sacred. But I suggest we embrace all of life as sacred, since we are no more spiritual when doing these exercises than when we are doing the everyday tasks of washing our bodies, dressing, cooking, cleaning, doing our normal work, going to school, teaching school, disciplining children, or whatever your work is. To do these tasks as unto the Lord, to thank God for our bodies, to clothe ourselves with the robe of righteousness, to be mindful of how the normal daily acts of living are essential. Asking the question "Where is God in this?"—whatever this may be. It takes discipline to show up, to be aware, to believe that God is in every moment, yes even in the very painful ones.

One of my "standing on holy ground" experiences was being with Florence as she was dying. She was one of my residents at Greencroft when I worked as the chaplain there. Florence had been a nurse in India for many years, and she had begun a nursing school there. She had never married, even though I understand she had that option on several occasions. She didn't take job offers that would have certainly brought more financial security, because she was very sure that God had called her to India and she was about God's work. By the time I met Florence she was well advanced with Alzheimer's disease. The morning I heard she was dying I went to her room and sat with her, holding vigil until the end. While I sat with her, I looked at her now-tattered scrapbooks and realized that another of my residents, Goldie, was also in India at the same time; there were pictures of her in this scrapbook. As I looked further I realized that Florence had grown up in Idaho, in the same town as Liz, another resident. I remember sitting there rather amazed that these three women whose lives had intersected in different times of their lives now lived under the same roof.

After a death at Greencroft we do a releasing ritual where we take a quilt, made especially for this purpose, and lay it across the body and then invite staff and family to gather around the bed to remember, bless, and release this person to God's care. We often share memories of the person. As I thought about who might want to be part of this for Florence, I went to Goldie and to Liz, and they both wanted very much to join us. We had just begun—the room was full—when Weyburn Groff, now well advanced in years, came to the door, holding a bouquet of flowers to give to Florence. He did not yet know she had died. We quickly explained what had happened and what we were doing. When I gave time to share memories, Mr. Groff said that within the first week he and his wife Thelma were in India as missionaries, he needed an appendectomy. After checking in at the clinic, they discovered that the doctor had just arrived the day before to hold hours at the clinic and that the nurse who stayed with him all night after the surgery was ... Florence. I remember the silence, the awe we all felt as we experienced this holy moment. I felt like we should take our shoes off. Seeing God in the moment.

So we need to show up – pay attention.

2. Reflection – stopping the flow of words.

Many of you know part of the journey we have had with our daughter Janelle with the inability to carry a child full term. There have been a number of miscarriages and a stillbirth. After hearing that she was pregnant again, I was lamenting to my spiritual director about how I should pray for her. I had prayed, asking God for protection for the unborn child, I had grieved the loss of several, and I was at a loss as how to pray. She suggested that I stop the verbal prayer, light a candle and allow the flame, the light, to be my prayer. So when I remember Janelle, I try to light my prayer lamp. And yes it is lit again as we hold her and her husband in the light.

We have a similar practice here in church that we practice ever Sunday.

[Walk silently to the peace lamp and light it and return to podium.]

Sometimes we speak about the peace lamp before or after we light it, and sometimes we allow the light of it to remind us what we are asking God for without words. We are drawn to the light, and it becomes our prayer. Words are not necessary.

Hearing God in the silence. Sometimes God does speak loudly, but I believe there are many moments when we need to stop the flow of words and listen. Listen for the still small voice. Sit in silence, work in silence, and observe in silence. God is all around you.

Being outside in holiness of nature, the grandeur of sky and vegetation, or in this season observing the dormancy of winter, speaks loudly of God's silent

rejuvenation. I cannot tell you what all is evolving underground or how the roots of the trees and plants are being nourished, but I know this stage of silence, the unseen life that was happening, is essential.

It is not just about silencing the words but silencing our inner being. We can refrain from speaking, but our minds and souls may still be in great turmoil. What does it mean to bring your inner person to rest? I don't know what it is for you. It may be taking a walk, going for a run, fishing, sitting in silence, or planting and nurturing flowers, journaling—fill in the blank for yourself.

Think of the silence of sleep as a spiritual practice. We often think of just collapsing in our beds, shutting off the brain if we can, forgetting our troubles for the next hours. When we sleep we surrender the affairs of our lives and the issues of the world. In fact, I suggest that you verbalize this surrender to God. The world keeps turning, plants continue to grow, proteins repair our tired muscles, and dreams work in the subconscious. God renews, regenerates, refreshes, and all we need to do is lie in our beds. **God is at work in the silence.**

Hopefully when we awake there will be renewed energy to reengage the world, to do what needs to be done, to join God in what is already in process.

Lament and grief often lend themselves to silence—no words are needed. We do a disservice trying to connect with the grieving with many words; a silent presence may be the gift that is needed.

In the deep laments of Lamentations, where it feels like there is no end to pain and sorrow, there are places where scripture says, "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good ... to sit alone in silence" (3:26-28). God is in the silence, because God is with us. Many of you know this lament much better than I do and could teach us much about the silence of lament.

3. Practicing the presence, and again I emphasize "the practice."

One of our children learned to play the violin. In the beginning the music wasn't pretty, but after months and years of practice beautiful melody came from the same violin.

Practicing the presence of God is a way of life. We do not need more information about God to do this practice. To do the simple tasks of everyday life builds on our lives, one meal at a time. There will be times in our lives when we have experiences with God that we remember for a long after—like the time when I was 12 and alone in our basement when a tornado was coming—but most of our growth comes from everyday living,

everyday serving, everyday thanking, and just being everyday people. Nothing grandiose but very essential—"whatever you do in word or deed, do all for the glory of God." It is about a continued conversation with God. Practicing the presence of God.

Daily exercise: Ask two questions at the end of the day (dinner table conversation, putting children to bed, or when you go to bed):

- 1. For what moment today am I most grateful?*
- 2. For what moment today am I least grateful?*

*This exercise helps us be aware of God and God's movement in our lives. It helps us to **stop** and reflect, to take time, to go over the day, to share the day with others and with God.*

You could change the question to:

- 1. Where was I aware of God's presence today?*
- 2. Where was I oblivious to God's presence today?*

Or for children:

- 1. What made me happy today?*
- 2. What made me sad today?*

Make it your question. It helps you to show up, be reflective, and to practice.

Experiencing God is waking up to the presence of God no matter where you are or what you are doing. It's not about being at the right place, at the right time, in the right position, or even how smart you are. It is in fact about God. Where you are—God is there. It is knowing God through our bodies—we indeed are God's temple.

We live and worship through our bodies; it is our way of knowing. Prayer is happening, God is happening and we are in the midst of it all.

Benediction:

May the God who breathed life into each of you go with you from here practicing God's presence. Amen.