
Oh, the Beautiful Places Where I Have Found God!

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The First Sunday in Lent – Year C

“Yes!” I say!

I say “Yes!” to so many people who are eager to tell me all the places they have found God.

“I find God out in the wild,” they say, “up in the majestic mountains and at the edge of the expansive oceans. I find God in nature, in the beautiful outdoors. I find God in the rugged wilderness.”

“Yes!” I say, “I agree!” I have found God in those places, too. I am fortunate to have grown up in places a bit like that. I knew the beauty of God in the woods and in the lakes and in the pastures and fields of the countryside where I grew up. There was something simple and quiet, and overwhelming, out there. I learned about God fishing in the ponds, and hunting in the woods.

I have found something of divine holiness in the incessant rhythm of ocean waves, in the drawing and withdrawing of sand at the beach. In the deep water itself, beneath the surface, is the muscle and mystery of God.

I find God in the rhythm of the seasons, hot and cold, rainy and dry, windy and still. Even the awe of thunderstorms shows me something of the power of God. Certainly I have found God in the calm peace of a beautiful sunset, and in early eagerness of a sunrise.

Or how about walking? Merely walking, outside, along the turns of roads, and in the risings and fallings of paths, I become aware of something holy, right with me. The walking itself reveals something of God.

“Yes, I agree! I, too, find God in those places!”

I hear something of God when I listen to the birds, from the curious wail of a high hawk, to the small chatter of songbirds at my feeder. In the swamps, I have been mesmerized by the swelling chorus of tree frogs and spring peepers. I have gotten lost in the buzz of cicadas, in the hoots of the barred owls.

“Yes!” I say, “God is in those places.” God is everywhere!

Some people, even in jest, say they find something of God on the golf course! I don’t play golf, but I sense the sometimes spiritual element of the sport. The golfer is outside in the raw elements of weather, even if on a manicured green. The golfer learns to concentrate, practices paying attention only to what is worth paying attention to; that, in my mind, is the essence of prayer, too. People who pay attention know something of spiritual practice.

I don’t play golf, but I played other sports. And I admire the devotion and discipline of the athlete. I admire the practice and discipline of the artist, too, and of the musician and of the dancer. One finds something of God as one follows these beautiful pursuits.

“Yes!” I say. I agree that one can find God almost anywhere. The Holy is around us, and with us, and in us.

But, let’s go further. The Holy is even in those students whom teachers spend their endless days with. The Holy is in those patients whom physicians and nurses serve. The Holy is in those clients of our businesses. The Holy

is in the people we feed and serve, and teach and love

"Yes!" I say. The holiness of God is in all sorts of places, even in some places where people claim God is not.

"Yes!" I say.

And here's the thing: I have even found God in church! In church!

I am puzzled when spiritual seekers are unable, or sometimes obstinately unwilling, to find God in churches. Oh, I certainly realize, and lament, the harm that some organized religion has produced. May God have mercy upon mean religious leaders.

Still, I have found God even in church. I have found God even in the routines of prayer and sermon, song and silence, that can seem so tedious –but mainly they are tedious to those who are already bored.

In the faces and words of ordinary people at church, I have found the same God who appears in the ordinary branches and leaves of trees in the woods. What might seem like the monotonous, repetitive prayer of church has the same rhythm of ocean waves rising and falling at the beach. These routines, these routines of church, mean something. They carry the muscle and mystery of God.

The weather rhythms of hot and cold, wet and dry, are mirrored in our church seasons of birth and death, joy and sadness, Lent and Easter. In church, I sometimes hear the raspy frog voices, and I sometimes hear the sweet soul of the white-throated sparrows. In church, I hear the same heavenly chorus that I have heard outdoors.

My walks through the church year, and through the church hallways and pews, and these aisles, and through the church prayers, are just as delightful as walks in the woods, or walks on the beach. I find all sorts of things on those walks; what looks like lonely driftwood on the beach, and what looks like lonely drifted people at church, are actually beautiful and weathered souls, eager and thankful for God.

Oh, the beautiful places I have found God! Even in church! Join me. Use this spring to go to church somewhere. Or to some synagogue or mosque that has stood the test of holy time. At church, this is a holy season for us. According to ancient tradition, we call these next forty days, "Lent," when the days of God's creation begin to "lengthen." It is uncertain, but one theory of where the word, "Lent," comes from, is that it comes from the word, "lengthen." Days are lengthening.

God is in these rhythms. God is even in our broken branches and yearning blossoms. God is in our driftwood and in our spring growth. Our prayer, clumsy as it may be sometimes, is part of God's creativity, in bringing Easter and new life into the world!

AMEN.

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