
Surely the Lord is in This Place

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
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It is good to be home!

This past week, I've been on pilgrimage to Crystal Lake, Michigan with an Episcopal parish from Arizona. Together we hiked along coastal dunes, tended to a community garden, kayaked down the Crystal River, uprooted invasive mustard garlic from a nature preserve, and relaxed in the evenings on the lakeshore. All week, we meditated on the image of the Garden, on the paradise we left behind in Genesis, and on the vision of the heavenly garden we still anticipate in the Revelation to John. Caught between these two images of eternal home, and far from our actual houses, with the threat of homesickness looming, again and again we found ourselves asking: "What makes a place feel like home?"

The best answer we came up with is this: home is where we notice God.

Holy scripture is full of people who encounter God far from home, far from anything familiar. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Mary and Joseph, Paul... the list goes on! One great story is that of Jacob. Running from his brother and sleeping in the wilderness with just a stone for a pillow, Jacob dreams of a ladder reaching into heaven, with angels ascending and descending. When he wakes up, he exclaims, "*Surely the Lord is in this place - and I did not know it!*" And he names the place *Bethel*, meaning "house of God".

How awesome is this place! Jacob didn't expect to meet God there. It didn't look like a sanctuary. There were no pews or altars or stained-glass windows. Just a hard rock on the edge of nowhere. But in his noticing, he found home.

This is one of the great spiritual invitations of summer. Whether we are traveling across the country or just stepping out into a slower rhythm, we're given a chance to see things differently. Summer invites us to pay attention: to feel the warmth of sunlight on our skin, to listen to the sounds of noisy cicadas, to experience a new landscape with different foliage under the same stars. Summer invites us to become more aware of our surroundings, our relationships, our breath, and in that awareness, to notice God.

And when we notice God, we will find that a sense of home follows. Not because we are in a familiar place, but because we are grounded in a familiar presence, rooted in a familiar love. We remember who we are and whose we are.

That's what happened on our pilgrimage. We were far from home, but we started to feel at home, not just with each other, but with the land, with the quiet, with God. We could have named our camp Bethel, for in those disorienting, wonder-filled wilderness moments, we gained an awareness of home, God's home with us.

So, wherever summer takes you, I invite you to practice the awareness of home. Ask yourself: What makes me feel at home? What reminds me of God's nearness? And when you notice it—stop. Give thanks. Name it, like Jacob setting up a stone.

May your summer be full of little altars. May you find home wherever you are. And may you come to say, with wonder and gratitude: "*Surely the Lord is in this place!*"