

Not Always on a Mountaintop ~ March 6, 2011
Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9; Psalm 2

Most often, when people have an encounter with God, we call it “a mountaintop experience.” If you have ever worked your way up a mountain, you will recall the wonder of standing high above the world with nothing between you and God.

When we ponder mountaintop experiences, we may see, in our mind’s eye, Moses enveloped by the glory of God as he receives the Ten Commandments. Or, we envision Jesus being transfigured, changed in appearance, by his face-to-face encounter with his Creator. Both returned from the mountaintop changed people. Moses carried the law for his nation—rules that were intended to guide it throughout life and lead it to a closer relationship with their God. The change in the appearance of Moses was so evident that he would veil his face when he would speak to the people to keep them from being frightened and distracted. Jesus came down from his mountaintop reaffirmed and strengthened by the renewed knowledge that he was God’s beloved son. Both Jesus and Moses went on to inspire those who chose to follow them.

We often think that it would be wonderful to have a mountaintop experience or two in our lifetimes. We believe that such an encounter with God would help us understand and discover just what it is God wants of us. We believe that it would be enriching and life changing. Such experiences often are. But, we do not have to climb a mountain to have an experience, An epiphany, that turns our life around. God can be found in other places. Some of which may surprise us.

Sometimes those places may be way down in the valleys of despair, disappointment and disillusionment. Sometimes we find God in the darkest places: in the diagnosis of an illness, the loss of a love, the death of a dream. In these places and at these times we may sit in the depths and sigh, “Woe is me” as we wonder where help and hope is for us in our condition. We lift up our eyes to the hills and hope some relief will come our way.

Often when we fall into a pit, we learn what it is that is the very best in us. We discover our strengths, we find the talent within us that has always been there waiting to be used. We lay aside our arrogance and our sense of knowing it all and in our vulnerability discover the truth and base of our being. Many have told me that they have had to hit rock bottom before they can regain their balance and fully enter life once again. Sometimes, as painful as life may be at the lowest point, we find time to step aside from all that pulls at us and begin to focus on what it is that is most important to us. When we are at the bottom, the only way we can look is up.

Other times we might discover God peering at us from within another person. We might have injured someone and have braced ourselves to be a target for their wrath and unhappiness. Instead, we find them greeting us with warmth and compassion and understanding. We see forgiveness shining through them and we realize that we are in the presence of God. Or, we might desperately need someone to listen to us and help us work through a difficult problem or make a hard decision in life. Often we find a patient, listening ear and we know we are not alone. We find a calm spirit that helps us put everything in order.

Encountering God through another person may cause us to wonder how it is we might be able to become a reflection of our Creator for others. What is it we need to set aside in our nature to

become a more Christ-like channel for the presence of the One who created us? Do we need to set aside a tendency to be judgmental? Do we need to set aside our mad dash through life so that we are able to truly spend time with someone in despair? To be really present with them? Do we need to remember that our faith system relies on relationships and that the very base is love?

God can be found anywhere, wherever we may be. God is at the very top and the very bottom of our lives and at all those places in between. We need only to reach in to the center of our beings and then reach out to the struggling world and people around us to reveal the blessings of this good and gracious gift.

-- Amen