

FINDING GOD: In everyday life & in the summer

Intro

Why “seeking/finding God” now?

Aside from the fact that we are always seeking God, it’s during the summer that we may have more time because ⁽¹⁾ activities & programs shut down for summer (does God go on vacation?) & ⁽²⁾ some (?) summer vacations offer more time & quiet for intentionality in seeking G (esp. when small children have grown up)

Seeking God: why?

RB (Prologue) calls us, as Benedictines, to “listen carefully to my (Benedict’s) instructions & attend to them with the ear of your heart”. This enjoins us to approach the search for God with an open heart, an open mind, & an expectation that we will find God. And why shouldn’t we?

In the Bible, we find all sorts of encouragement to seek God. Jesus says, “I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:10). That’s an open invitation for Jesus’ listeners to approach God, knowing what God’s response will be. This concept of *approachability to God* is found in O.T. book of 1Chron., where David is talking to Solomon before he tells him that he, Solomon, is to build the temple. He says, “And you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with single mind and willing heart; for the LORD searches *every* mind, and understands every plan and thought. *If you seek him, he will be found by you*” (1 Chron. 28:9). We, human creatures, have the search for God in our DNA – we are programmed for it. Remember Augustine (in the *Confessions*), who wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”

And in the BCP, we find encouragement on seeking God in our baptismal vows, where we vow to “seek and serve Christ ...” In Eucharistic Prayer D, we pray that “In your mercy you came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you”. From the Hymnal (#711), we sang “seek ye, first, the Kingdom of God ...” In the RB, in Scripture, in Patristic literature, & in Episcopal liturgies, we are encouraged to seek God. This search informs our spirituality.

At St. Tim’s

We are big into mission here at St. Tim’s. That’s what we have become known for in the diocese, & that’s what brings new people to our doors. But, without the spirituality – the seeking of God – to drive our mission, mission becomes *ours*, & *not* God’s. Our spirituality – our relationship with God – drives our mission, & conversely, our mission drives our spirituality. Our spirituality in the group, here, is shaped by the Rule of Benedict. It is up to us to draw out its sixth century meaning, in order to relate it to our everyday life.

Seeking God: where?

So, *where* are we to look for God? Well, God is within us - & God is external to us. Getting into the mood, let us consider all time & place as sacred. That is, at *any* time & in *any* place, we have the opportunity to encounter

God, the Risen Lord. We can, indeed, find God in *ordinary* life, & we don't need to be in a church to experience God. However, we will want to see our ordinary life, and church, as vehicles for God's revelation to us.

In Joan Chittister's words, "the RB is a book of ordinary wisdom about the major themes of life. The RB deals with the presence of God, the foundation of relationships, the nature of self-development, and the place of purpose ... Life is a way of walking through the universe *whole* and *holy*." That encourages us to see every day as holy, and as a time & place to encounter God. This is what makes life Incarnational for us – for, in Jesus' earthly life, he made his world sacred - &, it still is. If Chittister encourages us to walk our journeys in life whole & holy, then the only way we can do that is to seek & find God.

Then she interprets the RB to say that "let nothing go by without being open to being nourished by the inner meaning of that event in life". In other words, if we are *open* to transformation, we can *expect* to find meaning to that event. But, we can't expect to find meaning in life if we are not intentional about finding it. "If we do not live life consciously, we may not be living at all." Chittister says, "Spirituality is learning to be aware of what is going on around us, & allowing ourselves to feel its effects". She tells the story of the Hasidim rabbi of a village who said, "Our task is not to put God into our lives. God is already there. Our task is simply to realize that".

Q: what does the expression "seeking God" mean to you?

Q: how are we *intentional* about seeking meaning in our lives? How is "meaning" related to God?

God blesses ordinary, everyday things, events, people, places, etc., & we can find them sacred. All we have to do is to open ourselves up to experience that holiness, that Godness.

God is with us for the receiving, but not for any spiritual payment, only for realizing what we already have. Listen with the ear of the heart; seek with the eye of the heart (Sue's paraphrase of RB).

Finding God in Summer

Specifically, let's look at how God is revealed during the summer. Take *places*, for example.

Q: in what places do we find ourselves in the summer?

Vacations: visiting holy places (in each town, each state, each country visited) such as churches, important historic sites, important sacred sites, a place holding memories – any place where a person, an event, a memory points to God – brings forth the presence of God.

Outdoors: being outdoors in God's creation often evokes the presence of God. For the contemplative pray-ers, simply sitting quietly in the woods, reflecting on one small part of God's Creation (e.g., leaf) can evoke the immanent presence & power of God. If hiking, a beautiful landscape, sunrise, or sunset can bring about the awe & transcendent presence of God.

Q: If you pick up a rock on a summer hike, how might it evoke the presence of God?

And, what about animated objects of God's creation (e.g., birds in migration)? In what way do they reflect God? How do they reflect God's diversity, beauty, intelligent plan (of migration), etc.?

Group Exercise

- 1) Have group think of images of God [sources: primarily, Scripture, with examples being 1Peter (living rock), Matt. 7:24-25 (rock), Exodus, psalms]. Images would include rock, water, breeze/wind, blade of grass, tree, flower, rain, fire, cloud, mountain, rain (on newsprint)
- 2) Choose a particular image
- 3) Reflect on how it reveals God's presence to you – take 5 minutes

Indoors: spending time indoors (rainy day, ill health, etc.) also offers opportunities to experience God. Aside from your at-home prayer activities, you can also find God revealed in the people you interact with. God can be experienced in the joy of playing board games with others, 'phoning friends, the memories associated with looking at, or working on, scrapbooks. Q: any other ideas here?

Group Exercise

- 1) Think about cooking & serving food
- 2) What attributes of God might be reflected by you in that endeavor? (on newsprint?)
- 3) What Biblical references come to mind? (e.g., generosity & love of Jesus, feeding of Israelites with manna by God in the Exodus, Jesus feeding of 5,000 & having fish fry on beach after Resurrection)

Q: In what other milieu might we discover God this summer? Where else might we find new life? A sure sign that we are experiencing the Living God is wherever we find joy, true pleasure, new insights, & beauty.

"How blessed are these days (my paraphrase), when earth and heaven are joined, and man is reconciled to God" (*Exsultet*, BCP, p. 287 from the Easter Vigil). "May God, who joins heaven to earth & earth to heaven, give us His favor, ..." (Book of Occasional Services, a Christmas blessing). Seeking and finding God allows us to experience the intersection of heaven and earth!!

If you want a rich reflection, you might try meditating on Isaiah 43:1-12 → God's invitation to be in relationship with you.

The Rev. Sue Eastes, 2010
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Readings: RB (prologue)