

You probably know the old saying about preaching: It needs to “comfort the afflicted... and afflict the comfortable!” But it is Impossible to meet all needs; Some folks here are really comfortable, and some are feeling afflicted... So I often try to alternate approaches! Last week’s sermon had more to do with afflicting (*challenging*) the comfortable; in the gospel reading, Jesus went up against the Roman ruler Herod who wanted to kill him. Jesus said, and I paraphrase: “You go tell that fox, that he can’t stop me! I’ll continue to teach and heal, and speak of a new “kingdom” based on love and justice, good news for the poor and liberty for all who are oppressed.” Jesus resisted the oppressive powers of his day, with a revolution based on Love!

This morning, with official start of Spring (cold as it may be), I chose to focus more on the comfort aspect of our faith, focusing more on the words of the prophet Isaiah and the Psalm writer, in the Jewish writings. They both speak about THIRST for God, and give some promises (or *comfort!*) about various ways that God can quench our thirst.

First of all, I want to be clear that the concept and definition of “God” is something we can never pin down. “Heavenly Father” has the comfort of personal relationship, and was spoken by Jesus himself. Though I think most of mature faith would agree that a Supreme Being, a Creator of all, the Eternal Spirit, has no physically male features, is no old man with a beard in the sky. “God” will always be *beyond* our ability to define.

Some call God “Source,” many now use the word “Universe.” Theologian Paul Tillich, back in the 60’s, referred to God as the “*Ground of Being.*” We remember that Jews often will not even say the word God, and prefer to say Adonai (meaning Lord) or Ha Shem (the name). When Moses asked God’s name at the burning bush, he

heard the reply: “I am who I am.” As the prophet Isaiah wrote, “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*” A natural conclusion of this is that human beings, being different, will have different thoughts and views and experiences of the Divine Spirit. It follows naturally that human beings will have many faiths, in many cultures. So how can anyone insist that their faith is the only way to experience God in this world. Interfaith studies and relationships are important!

This begs questions about the Judeo-Christian Bible. Yes, the writers of the Bible had a variety of viewpoints and experiences of God. They wrote at different time periods, with different cultural situations. The letters of Paul were written to different churches that had different needs. The four Gospel writers also have different slants, different emphases about Christ. I find this to be a *comfort*. We all bring our own experiences and our own questions when we read the Bible. (If you have time, come visit our lively Tuesday midday “Bible Exploration”... There are many views and questions; we all learn from each other.

In the “thirst” for God that Isaiah and the Psalm speak of, I think the poetic images of thirst and hunger make it clear that they are not seeking literal definitions of God, not seeking *ideas about* God, but they are seeking an *experience of* God, the presence and fruits of the Spirit... love, hope and joy, peace, etc.

This holds true for Jesus also, that we are not seeking simply *ideas about* Jesus (people have fought over this for centuries), but we hope to experience the *presence of* Jesus, as Spirit, and to follow as best we can the *teachings of* Jesus. He spoke to different people in different ways. It is natural that some of his teachings and

stories will resonate more with us at different stages or seasons of our lives.

One teaching of Jesus that I think probably resonates with many of us in this new season of Spring, is his teaching from the Sermon on the mount about flowers and birds! When Jesus is teaching about worry, he says look at the flowers and look at the birds! See how much God takes care of them! I know a friend in town here who I've nicknamed the flower evangelist! He sends text pictures of close-ups of the most glorious intricate flowers, as a way of insisting that there must be a Creator God! I know a musician, Carrie Newcomer (who sang here with our Roots concerts)... who recently wrote a blog about Springtime in Indiana, based on her own pussy willow tree, that she planted as only a twig! Not only do we see the miracle of a twig growing into a large tree, but Carrie Newcomer tells about how she clips off new growth and gives them to friends... who delight in how beautiful and soft and furry they are. (It reminds me of the lab-doodle pup next to me; everyone says how cute looking he is, and if they reach to pet him, they usually beam and remark at how soft he is!) All this is the presence of God as *beauty* in nature.

I think we are all thirsty and hungry ... yes, for more than than literal water and bread. We are thirsty for that which lasts, which we call "God" or eternal Spirit. We remember that Jesus said to the woman at the well, I can give you "living water," and he said to his disciples, I can give you "bread" that truly satisfies." We are thirsty for those *qualities/experiences* that we attribute to God and Jesus: Hope, Love, Peace, Joy, etc.

Isaiah and the Psalm writer insist, from their own experience, that "God" can be found everywhere, at anytime. This faith and conviction is echoed by people of other faiths also, as we know

from the yogic emphasis on the “present moment,” to be “mindful,” and fully aware of the goodness of the present moment, of our very breath coming in and out. One of the phrases from Psalm 63 that particularly stands out to me is: “I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night! The Psalm suggests that the quietness of the night is a good time to invite the Spirit of God more deeply into our minds and hearts; I try to do this when I have trouble getting to sleep... Yes, it is like a “meditation” time: Breathing in goodness, light, hope, breathing out troubles, anxieties. This phrase also makes sense for the wee hours of the morning... meditating on God can help us have hope for the upcoming day, help to guide our plans and our attitudes...

So in finding God everywhere, anytime, I want to share a song that I wrote. It’s good for me every Spring, to encourage myself, an echo of Jesus words to meditate upon nature.

***Chorus: Spring is here again, I can feel it in the air!
Spring is here again, there’s new life everywhere.
Flowers start to bloom and the birds begin to sing,
It’s Springtime, come back again!***

- 1. Oh the things that we can do, now the sun is shining through,
Time to get outdoors, and start something new! **Chorus***
- 2. Oh the places we can go and explore, what ‘ya waiting for?
Time for us to say: “New life, we’re on the way!” **Chorus***