

Where is God?

The Rev. Thomas Szczerba, Jr.
St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA
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Proper 5, Year B

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

In my prayer life, I often ask myself, “Where is God?” This question allows me to take notice of the moments, people, and places that I’ve experienced God in my life recently. As I began my journey to the priesthood, almost eleven years ago, this question was extremely important as it helped frame why I felt called to be a priest. When I asked myself that question at the beginning of my journey to ordination, my answers were different than they are today. Back then, I experienced God mainly through the church community that I was raised in. I had an extremely effective and pastoral rector, by the name of the Rev. Joan Mason. I had a tight knit group of people that helped raise me in the church, as they were my Sunday School teachers, confirmation and youth group leaders, we are close still today and I refer to them as my “church family”. In a lot of ways, I experienced God through other people almost exclusively. They were the ones who taught me how to pray, study scripture, and love my neighbor. My interactions with them, the way they cared for me and loved me was my experience of God.

Now, what I would call maturity of faith and person, I recognize what has actually happened to me because of those early relationships formed in my faith community. What happened was that my heart was changed. Because of them, I have developed a relationship with God that dwells within me. My rector and those church leaders helped build a foundation that has helped sustain me on this earthly journey through the many trials and afflictions that happen in life.

This foundation of knowing God that belongs in my heart is what feeds me and my ministry here at St. David’s and out in the world. Because I was able to experience God’s love through others, it helped me understand that my gifts, my love, the spirit of God that finds residence in me is an equal part of this God equation.

There is a famous icon of the Trinity that was created by Russian painter Andrei Rublev in the early 15th century. In Rublev's icon there are three figures that are supposed to represent the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are seated in a circle around a table, the three persons focusing their attention on the chalice bowl at the center of the table that reminds us, the viewer, of an altar at Communion. Near the chalice bowl, there is an empty space at the table. That space is intended to represent our seat at the table.

There is even some evidence that the original icon had a small mirror attached to it in the location of that empty space at the table with the Trinity. So that the viewer of the icon could look at it and see themselves. Rublev wanted us to realize that we are invited to complete this circle, to join the dance, to complete the movements of God in the world by our own response. The table is spread, the door is open. Come, and recognize that God is within us.

Our passage from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians today, is interested in reminding the reader, like the Rublev icon, that God is within us. Paul wanted the people in Corinth to have confidence in their belief that because God raised Jesus from the dead, we too will be raised. That sure and certain hope in the resurrection, this gift that we have been given, is for all those who believe. In return we should give thanks and glory to God, as we extend this good news to more and more people.

And though our mortal bodies may be wasting away, our inner nature, that piece of God that resides in us, is being renewed every day. It is renewed by the hope we have in the resurrection. It is renewed by our life of prayer and thanksgiving, and it is renewed through our interactions with one another as we share our faith and love.

In a way, this passage from Second Corinthians feels like something you would hear at a funeral service. It talks about the afflictions of life. It uses a metaphor of a tent to talk about our mortal bodies. It makes reference to our outer nature wasting away. These are all true things, and reminders of what really matters, which is our inner nature. How are we allowing God to dwell within us so that new life can take place, so that when we are afflicted and confronted with the difficulties of life, we remember the resurrection. We remember what Jesus did for us on the cross.

As Paul said in our letter today, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It's important for us as Christians to build a strong foundation for the house of God to live in our hearts. The afflictions we face are temporary, but our love of God is eternal. Jesus' death was for us. He showed us that out of his suffering came new life. When we believe and follow him, we have the opportunity to experience that resurrection as well.

Over the past few weeks, I've had the privilege of helping lead an adult confirmation and reception class with the Rev. Sarah Dunn for those interested in joining this branch of the Jesus movement that we call the Episcopal Church. One of the assignments we asked this group of nine future Episcopalians was to talk a little bit about their faith journey. We essentially asked them the questions, "Where is God? Or Where has God been in your life?" I have to say it was an absolute blessing to be in that room hearing everyone share their stories.

Everyone had different, but similar answers. One of the common themes I heard was how each one of them was able to discover God here at St. David's. They talked about a feeling of the Holy Spirit, a sense of renewal, and a reality that they saw this place as their new church home. So much so, that they wanted to make it official on June 16th when the bishop comes to St. David's. They talked about how welcomed they felt by the congregation and clergy. They were moved by the worship and music, and they felt like they could grow in their faith. What I heard in those stories was the love of God growing inside of them. I heard their inner nature feeling refreshed and filled with God's love.

I sensed that they could feel themselves sitting in unity at the table with the Trinity. These followers of Christ felt like they belonged in this equation of love. It made me happy to know that when Sarah and I asked them, "Where is God?" that they could see God here at this church and they could also feel God in their heart. The foundation they are building for God to live within them is happening and I'm grateful we get to be a part of it.

The question of, "Where is God?" could be applied to all of our prayer lives. I hope when we answer that question we first point toward our heart. Yes, the people and places that have formed us are extremely important, they introduced us to God. Yet, how we personally know God, in relationship to our inner nature is even more important. Because knowing God in

our heart is accepting the gift which was given to us on Easter Day, the gift of resurrection and new life.

When we know that God resides within us and that we have a seat at the table, we are more equipped to handle the afflictions in life that Paul mentioned. These afflictions are inevitable, we are bound to experience pain and suffering on our earthly pilgrimage. That suffering is only temporary when we believe in the resurrection and the new life that is possible when we follow Jesus, our redeemer and friend.

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