

Sermon Preached
By Doug King
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Isaiah 25:6-10a, Proverbs 9:1-6

My soul has two lifelong pilgrimage destinations, not Jerusalem, not Mecca, New York City and the ocean. Like the swallows returning to Capistrano, these are places I am drawn to again and again. I suppose both of these places found a home in my soul growing up on Long Island. These places make me feel newly alive. They fill me with energy and joy. They open my eyes to the wonders of the world around me. They remind me of the beauty of creation.

I suspect that each of us has a place or places that we need to journey to once in a while to be renewed by child like wonder. For some it may be as close as the garden in their backyard and for others it may be across the globe. It is possible we have never made any connection between these favorite places and anything theological, let alone dubbing these places as destinations of pilgrimage, but that is indeed what they are.

This summer if you have had the opportunity to travel to that special place or if you will have the opportunity in the coming weeks, I want you to recognize the spiritual dimension of your experience. I want you to think about the hospitality of God's creation for us that is made so obvious when we are in the midst of our special destinations. In the past year we have been awakened to a sense of fear and foreboding in our world. We have grown fearful of airplanes and skyscrapers. We have grown fearful of opening letters and being in crowded places. We have been reminded that the world can be a very dangerous place. It is a reality that there is no denying. But this reality is not the only reality and certainly it is a reality much smaller than the reality of what God has given to us in this world. God has given us the distinct gift of physical life in the midst of an abundant creation.

We are called to recognize the vastness and depth of this gift, to revel in the sights, the textures, the tastes, the sounds, the smells that surround us. We fall short of God's dreams for our lives when we as we walk around this world numbed by routine. My numbness is shaken off, my sense of wonder is triggered by the sound of waves crashing on the shore; the smell of sea air; and the feel of sand beneath my feet. My sense of wonder is triggered by the taste of the hot garlic potato chips and ice cold Bombay Sapphire martinis at the Union Square Café in Manhattan; the sight of the sun setting in Central Park; and the colors of a portrait of Lady Peal at the Frick museum. These experiences which I seek to engage in every year not only bring me distinct pleasure in the moment, they also remind my senses and my soul that God is seeking to bring pleasure to our senses all the time. It does not matter if we are in some distinct special place and moment, God is always gifting us with a cornucopia of reminders that we are surrounded by the divine hospitality of the universe.

In our reading from the prophet Isaiah we heard of God's sure promise that abundant life will indeed defeat the forces of death, the tears and turmoil that consume much of our time are sure to be dried in the embrace of the divine. Our reading from the book of Proverbs this morning informs us that God, in the form of dame wisdom, is offering us a great bounty if we "walk in the way of perception."

I quote from the Reverend Eido Tai Shimano, a buddhist monk, "People often ask me how Buddhists answer the question: 'Does God exist?' The other day I was walking along the river...I was suddenly aware of the sun, shining through the bare trees. Its warmth, its brightness, and all of this completely free, completely gratuitous. Simply there for us to enjoy. And without my knowing it, completely spontaneously, my two hands came together, and I realized that I was making, gassho," which is a bow of respect and gratitude, "and it occurred to me that this is all that matters: that we can bow, take a deep bow. Just that. Just that."

Obviously a Buddhist's understanding of divinity is radically different from our Judeo-Christian understanding and will not be papered over with over-simplified parallels. But the inspired perception of our senses leading us to a place of reverence is a valuable lesson from which we can learn. In these waning weeks of the summer walk in the ways of perception. If you are heading off on a pilgrimage to one of your favorite places, recognize the creative fingerprints of God upon all that you treasure about that place. But even if you are not off to some wonderfully special locale, recognize God's creative fingerprints upon your everyday universe, the tint of the early morning sky, and the smell of freshly mown grass. Even the brightness of a roadside billboard can reawaken your amazement for the gift of color.

Allow your senses to stop you in your tracks and fill you with a powerful sense of wonder. Walk in perception, recognizing the hospitality of this divinely created universe. Walk in perception for God created these wonders as a rich gift for us. Walk in perception celebrating God's generosity. Walk in perception, with each step taken being done in gratitude to our Creator. Walk in perception. Amen.