***WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN GOD IN THE MIDST OF THIS PANDEMIC?***

John C. Peterson

(with Amy Bussey, Frances Craig and Ty Tysinger)

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Staunton, VA

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Texts: Exodus 33:12-23 and John 21 1-14

 Moses had a problem. The people he was responsible for leading across the wilderness to the Promised Land, God’s chosen people, had ticked off the Lord by making an idol, a golden calf, while Moses was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments which included a commandment about not making any graven images! The people had paid a price for their unfaithfulness; Moses had forced them to grind the golden calf to dust and drink the gold-dusted water. God had inflicted a plague on them, but God’s anger was not yet assuaged. So God told Moses to get the people out of God’s sight, back on the road through the wilderness, but – and this was the crux of Moses’ problem – God would not be going with them. The Lord had had enough of this stiff-necked people and was so angry with them that there was divine concern that at their next act of unfaithfulness God might wipe them out and start over with some other chosen people. God’s anger did not extend to Moses, but that was little consolation, for God’s presence was key to Moses’ role as leader of the people; God had worked through Moses to rescue the people at the Red Sea and had provided water from a rock at Meribah. It was Moses’ intervention with the Lord on behalf of the people that led God to provide manna to feed them along the way. Without the Lord at his side, Moses saw a bleak future – for Israel and for himself.

 How did Moses solve this dilemma? He reminded the Lord that these were the people God had chosen; God could not just cast them aside, and if God did, God would be casting Moses aside as well. Moses trusted that the faithfulness of God would trump the anger of God and recommit the Lord to hanging in there with Israel and traveling with them across the wilderness toward the Promised Land. And then Moses made a bold request: he asked to see the glory of the Lord face-to-face. While that request was not granted, for no one can see the face of the Lord and live, God did offer to Moses the next best thing: a glimpse of the divine behind, the trailing glory of the Lord as the Lord passed by, visual confirmation for Moses of the presence of this God with whom he was in such close relationship.

 The desert is a daunting place to tackle alone; Moses knew that the people would need God with them to weather the perils that lay ahead. There are a host of such deserts that test one’s patience and perseverance, deserts that cannot be traversed alone. Over these last months the Coronavirus has been a desert in which we have all grudgingly sojourned together. Were we alone, it might be more than we could handle or survive or endure. But we trust, as Moses did, in the faithfulness of God and God’s promise to be with us at all times and in all places, even in the midst of a pandemic, especially in the midst of a pandemic. God is with us: that is God’s promise. We are to be instruments by which God is at work: that is our call. Have you seen God at work over these last months? We don’t expect to see the face of God, but we may catch a glimpse of God from time to time as God moves in and through and around us in these viral days.

 Today three of our folks come to share with you what they have seen and experienced and recognized as God’s presence with us in this pandemic. These are their stories, that we hope, may prompt you to reflect on and recognize God’s hand at work in your life too. For God is here! Here then are their responses to this question: ***Where have you seen God in the midst of this pandemic?***

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 We don’t always recognize God in our midst. The disciples in their fishing boats on the Sea of Tiberias didn’t recognize the risen Jesus when he called to them from the shore. It wasn’t until they tried what he suggested – letting down their nets on the other side of the boat and miraculously finding their empty nets suddenly full of fish – that they recognized that it was Jesus calling to them. In an otherwise ordinary moment, God was with them in a tangible way! As Rachel Held Evans notes:

*We expect a trumpet and a triumphant entry, but as always, God surprises us by showing up in ordinary things: in bread, in wine, in water, in words, in sickness, in healing, in death, in a manger of hay, in a mother’s womb, in an empty tomb.[[1]](#endnote-1)*

As you just heard from Amy and Frances and Ty, God is often present in more subtle ways, in surprisingly simple things – like wearing a mask or helping a COVID patient or providing a meal or offering an encouraging word. And it may be that it is through you that God appears to your neighbors or family or to total strangers. So be alert, not only to where you may next see God this week, but also to the ways in which God might appear to others – through you! Amen

1. Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday*, Nelson Books:2015, p.258 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)