

Sermon
Easter 6-B
St. Andrew's, Methuen
May 9, 2021
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Acts 10:44-48
Psalm 98
1 John 5:1-6
John 15:9-17

**WHEN DID YOU FIRST NOTICE GOD MAKING AN APPEARANCE
IN YOUR LIFE?**

Some groups teach you to name a time and date when God showed up in your lives. I belonged to such a group—Campus Crusade for Christ—my freshman year at the University of Georgia. I still remember that moment sitting on my bed in the dorm—though not the exact date—when I specifically prayed for God to come into my life.

Later, of course I realized that God had been working in my life while I was growing up at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, where I attended worship, Sunday school, youth group and served as an acolyte.

In today's reading from Acts, God makes a dramatic appearance in the life of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion. Before Peter even finishes his sermon, Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius and his household and they all start speaking in tongues and praising God and looking to be baptized.

Of course, to understand what happens to Cornelius we need to remember that the first thing Luke tells us about Cornelius is "He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God."

So long before he has a vision of an angel telling him to send for a "certain Simon who is called Peter" and long before the Spirit falls on Cornelius, **God is working in the life of this Roman soldier.**

Luke is telling us that God is working in a person's life long before they hear about Jesus or visit a church or we even have any awareness that God exists.

This is why author Frederick Buechner insist that we pay close attention to our lives: "Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it,

because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.”

As we honor our mothers today, it makes sense to also honor the lives our mothers gave us by looking for the signs of God who is the mother of all creation.

It has taken me many more years, though, to be able to imagine that God was also working in my life when I was playing hide and seek with the neighborhood kids or watching TV. In fact, the Spirit was also swirling around me even when I was doing those things I ought not to have done, but which teenagers think it is their job to do, if for no other reason than to mess with their parents.

Yet even today, to believe God is at work in every moment of every day goes against my default setting. I still hear the voice in the head saying that God is only present when I’m doing so-called holy things and having holy thoughts and feelings—which is to say, about 5% of the time.

So, even as a priest, I am in constant need of **praying with and playing with** the idea that God is always sustaining us and whispering in our souls the best thing we can do in this moment to make life beautiful, true, and good. The more we practice paying attention to God in every moment, the more we realize that the most important thing that is going on in us is that **WE ARE continually being BORN OF GOD.**

As the First Letter of John says today, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God...”

When we recognize that Jesus is born of God, we wake up to the fact that we also are born of God, **and as God’s begotten, we live in God’s house where God is saying to us what the father says to the elder son in the parable of the Prodigal son: “You are always with me and everything I have is yours.”**

And if this is who we are, then it makes sense that we spend time every day consciously connecting with God above us, God beside us, God as us.

I heard a testimony from a woman who said the other day a number of small things were causing her to worry—she had a broken faucet, a printer that wouldn’t print, and a recurring foot problem. She could feel herself starting to spiral down into anger and anxiety, but instead, she sat in a chair and spent time in prayer remembering her oneness with God, her being God-born.

When we begin our prayer by listing our problems we only become more upset, but when we begin our prayer by first settling into our communion with Mother-Father God, we will experience the peace that passes understanding and know the best way forward to deal with our problems.

 This is why John tells us we do not have to be a captive to anxiety, for “whatever is born of God **conquers** the world. **And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.**”

As Jesus says at the last supper, in John 16:33: “**I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have problems. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**”

Do we live in the victory we have in Christ?

If you visit the replica of the Parthenon in Nashville, TN, which I recommend, when you walk into the main temple, you’ll see a forty-foot-tall statue of Athena—my 7-year-old daughter screamed and jumped into my arms when she first saw ginormous Athena.

And standing in Athena’s outstretched right hand is a 6-foot-tall statue of the goddess of victory.

Her name is Nike, which is the Greek word for victory.

Nike is the word the New Testament uses to proclaim our victory in Christ.

The question is: do we gain victory in life from the Greek goddess or from American capitalism, or from wearing Nike shoes?

Or do we stake our victory on Christ?

Instead of staying stuck in anger and anxiety, do we reconnect with Mother-Father God who is always with us?

“Whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.”

 “What a friend we have in Jesus”—but not like a friend on Facebook who can unfriend us with one click, but like Jesus on the cross whose undying love wakes us up to the reality that we, too, are God-born and filled with the victory of God.