

Focusing In . . . June 2011

"Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that Moses had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush . . ." (Exodus 3: 3 - 4)

Last month I was able to take a class at Regent with professor Susan Phillips on Spiritual Disciplines. She offered us a different insight into the story of Moses and his encounter with the burning bush. She noted that it was a common practice to burn out the bramble and bush from grazing pastures in order to prevent the sheep from getting tangled and caught. So, it wasn't so much the burning bush that caught Moses' attention, but rather the fact that the bush was not being consumed. He "turned aside to see" which is a way of saying, he paid attention to something happening around him. It was because he "stopped" what he was doing and "attended" to this mystery that God called out to him by name, "Moses, Moses". Moses first turned aside and attended - then God spoke.

The Spiritual Disciplines are tools by which we learn to pay attention to our lives in order to notice where God is working and help us to create a space for God to speak into our lives. There are ancient practices that have been used throughout the history of the Christian church, but there are also personal practices that work with the individual rhythms of our lives and allow us to attend to God. It is important to examine our lives and see how we might we move away from the distractions of daily life and attend specifically to God's presence within our day. I realized that my need to walk is one way that I disconnect from my world, and free my thoughts to seek the heart of Jesus. I do not sit still very well, and so walking engages my body while freeing my mind to "turn aside and see". So often, the inspiration for these writings come while I walk and talk with Jesus. When I couple that discipline of walking with meditating upon the Scriptures, (lectio divina) and throw the beauty of nature into the mix, I often "hear" words of challenge, rebuke, comfort, encouragement, hope, and even on occasion, my own name spoken in love. When I turned aside from the business of my world and look for God, more often than not, I find him.

A few months ago I purchased a MacBook Pro computer and went through a bit of a learning curve to get the knack of an Apple over a PC, but it wasn't long before I was feeling very comfortable with my new laptop. However, I am keenly aware that I use this powerful computing machine at a very minimal level. I actually have no idea of all the things this computer can do and some that I do know, I haven't the skills to activate. I downloaded a program to photoshop pictures but after several attempts with tutorials, I have yet to learn one useful thing. I need a guide to walk me through the steps. If I only personally knew the creator of this computer or the master of the photoshop program, I could do so much more than I am able with some help. I have a fabulous resource at my fingers, but continue to use it as a basic word processor.

God, the Creator made me and has imbedded within me many gifts and abilities, passions and yearnings. My Creator knows who I am and what I can achieve like no one else can know. The more that I am in touch with my Creator, the better chance I have of utilizing the resources He has given me for living this life well. It isn't so that my life would be easier, but rather that I could become more like my elder brother, Jesus - the prototype for human living and loving. As a guide would help me learn this computer better, so a spiritual guide would greatly help me in listening and attending to God's presence. That is an area that I have not seriously explored but hope to investigate in the near future. Sermons, small group studies and conversations with spiritual friends all help to enhance my spiritual journey, but intentional time with a spiritual director would be even more beneficial in strengthening the spiritual practices in my life. It will be another growing edge if I can take the time and create the discipline, which is the effort required for all of our spiritual practices. Intentional, deliberate, regular practice in learning to be like Jesus.

My challenge to you is to reflect upon what are the spiritual practices and disciplines in your life that help you to "turn aside and see" where holiness is dwelling. Where do we need to remove our sandals for we are on holy ground and sense God's living presence? One commentator noted that when a person removed their sandals, it was a sign that they felt at home. I love that - i want to feel at home in the presence of the Holy, for that is our true home - where we were created to live, abiding in His ever-loving presence.

By grace alone,

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