

In Our Thirst for God

March 23, 2014

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There's something inside of us... something that pulls us out.

A yearning. A need. A desire. ...It's quiet. But it's powerful.

And there are different times---different moments in our lives
when this feeling grows stronger than it was before.

It comes and goes. ...Sort of ebbs and flows.

But just like the way the water of the ocean pulls back and returns---
--whichever way it moves, it's always there.

And just like the ocean (whether it sweeps closer or recedes)
is always in relationship with the sand and the shore...

...We're always in relationship with that beautiful Source of Life which pulls us close,
Even after we've spent some time away.

In our hearts, we have a need for God. A desire for God. A *thirst* for God.

And that need and that want to be closer with God—to know God and feel God—

Is just as natural to our souls as our thirst for water is to our throats.

And it's just as important to the wholeness of our life---the health of our life, while we're
here,

To feel that thirst satisfied. ...Quenched.

When we've pulled God inside, the satisfaction and fullness we feel

brings just as much relief to our souls as a glass of water after walking over long miles of
sand.

And not having that fullness of God inside... it leaves us just as dry. Just as lifeless.
...Just as much in danger of wasting away.

Ya know, it's funny. I was at lunch the other day with Katriena and Connie.
And Connie mentioned something she'd heard a mentor tell her a bunch of years back:
She said, "There are no coincidences, only divine manipulation."
And I liked that, because it pulled something together for me,
while we sat there, in that booth.
Not a huge thing. ...But something big enough to notice...
and something that maybe, not-so-coincidentally,
brings us to the heart of the words we read, this morning.

Okay... but in order for it to make any sense, I'm gonna have to double back....
(Don't worry, it'll all flow forward again, toward where we're going...)

I may have told some of you,
that when I first heard my call to ministry at age 17 (in a galaxy far far away)
I not too long after dreamed a strange dream.
I was back in Israel (from where I'd recently returned)... walking in the desert. Alone.
Well... I was sort of alone.
The sun shone all around me, and even though my shadow was the only one against the
dirt,
I felt God all around me as I walked.
In the *light*, God was there.

Everything that shined on all of that parched rock and sand ahead and behind,
With not a green thing in sight...it was God.

In the dream, I wasn't a teenager at age 17, but a little girl. A child.

I still *thought* like myself, but in body I was small.

And as I moved through that desert,

I eventually found myself struggling in a ditch. A sort of *trench*.

It was filled with a bunch of garbage. *Gross* things.

---Stuff I didn't want to touch. Stuff I wanted to walk through quickly, to get away from.

So I kept moving. Faster and harder.

Past all of the gunk, I finally reached the end of the trench, and climbed my way out,
somehow still clean from all of that clutter.

Just past that ditch, stood a huge boulder. And at its base, sat *three* rocks.

...Walking just a little further, I climbed on top of that big, bulging boulder...

...And I lifted my face to the sun---that light of God shining all around---soaking in Its warmth.

Then I remember looking down and into those three, much smaller rocks below.

...They were *black*.

In complete contrast to the swelling and swirling oranges, and reds, and browns and whites

of that boulder in the center... those three smaller rocks were *black* and *frail*.

The desert wind blew hard as a stared, and those black rocks began to break apart,
eventually turning to dust, and disappearing in the breeze.

And that was it.Then I woke up.

Now, I've always been a big fan of dreams.

Our subconscious speaks so much more clearly

than anything we can ever hope to say while we're awake and "aware."

I also happen to believe---and I hope this doesn't make you think I'm too kooky to take seriously---

But I also believe that in that different state of consciousness,

we're able to experience a much deeper level of communication

with the life inside of us (and even around us).

We're made more vulnerable to certain truths

which are too subtle for us to see when our eyes are open.

And I often wonder, if maybe God takes advantage of that vulnerability,

to take some time to say things to us that our minds are too busy

to hear while we're talking and walking around.

The writers of the our biblical texts seem to agree.

There are so many different experiences of God speaking to people in their dreams,

from the very beginning of The Book to the very end.

Anyway... so when I woke up

I went immediately to interpreting what it might have meant.

But it wasn't a strain. It wasn't so much an act of interpretation as it was of *hearing*.

Because without too much *thought*,

I was basically just *left* with this feeling of God guiding me ahead. Past troubles.

Past the all of the temporary and breakable things of this world....

...Into a *future*---a life with *Him*. It.

Coming so soon after my Call, I felt God assuring me of the places God would move me.

Letting me know that my life with God would be the only real thing. The only sure thing.

The only indestructible thing I could ever hope to experience while I was alive in this world.

It was God telling me God was with me, and taking care of me.

Even though the moments and places we move through in this life aren't always too comfortable, or nice to see.

It was a seeking, and a finding. ...A thirst and a quenching.

And that's *exactly* where we're left in the words we read this morning, right?

But okay... so what on earth made me think of that dream, this week?

It wasn't the readings, from the start, I'll tell ya that. (as much as they naturally relate.)

And that's where all of that stuff from back there, in the past, starts flowing forward again.

Here's where it starts getting *weird*, friends.

And when things start getting *weird*,

that's when you really start to sort of catch the scent of God working around you, right?

...Like catching a faint odor of cologne wafting through the room---

---that *strangeness* acting as a trace of the presence of God moving in your life.

(Because God does a lot of *really* weird things.

God's not predictable. It's not *boring* or mundane.

And It doesn't really care much about observing the restrictive rules of human rationality, does it?)

So moving forward again, to this past Thursday---that day Connie, in that booth at the restaurant, said:

“there is no such thing as coincidence, only divine manipulation...”

Thursday morning I woke up determined.

For the past several weeks, but even more so---even *worse*---in the days before,

I'd felt this horrible distance growing between myself and my experience of God.

It wasn't God's fault, it was mine. I'd been drifting, further and further away.

There were a lot of reasons...

...but no reason is ever a *good* reason to let go of the sight of God.

(Actually, the better reason we feel for drifting, tends to be all the more reason to stay close.)

But it had gotten bad enough---I'd drifted far enough---

--to the point where I didn't even see what I was missing anymore.

Just like anything else floating on the ocean, once you stop paddling---

---once you stop intentionally moving toward the shore, you just drift.

Further and further out. Until one moment you look up

and the sight of the sand and trees and sure footing is just gone from your sight.

Ever been there? Some of you might be there right now.

Some of you might have just come back from that place. But it's a place we all know.

...And that's where I found myself Thursday morning.

Finally coming to my senses enough to look up from the waters,
my desire for God, my sudden thirst for God overwhelmed me----
--just as my eyes opened over my pillow.

I finally felt, and saw, and noticed that distance that had grown
between me and God in all of that drifting.

So I started paddling.

Immediately I rolled out of bed. Walked into my office, and fell to the rug.

I closed my eyes, and prayed.

At first I started to pray that God would somehow fix all of the things
I'd been worried about, in specific ways.

...But it wasn't right. I've known God long enough to know that's not how God talks.

That's not how God moves.

So finally, in the middle, I just stopped. Stuttered, sort of, in my prayer.

In the middle of my conversation with God, I stopped being silly, asking for anything
specific.

And I asked God just to help me feel God's peace.

Regardless of what was happening around me.

I asked God to just lead me ahead into moments that would be okay...

... not because all of the *clutter* in my life would be *gone*,
but because my heart would rest in knowing *God was here*.

Between and around all of the mess.

Then standing up from that rug---from that dark, quiet place with God---

--without much thought at all...

...almost mechanically---automatically---I went and grabbed from one of my desk drawers

An object I'd kept around for awhile, which every time I saw, brought pain to my heart.

A pain which had caused me to lose focus, and set me to drift.

A pain which made me doubt where I was and where I was heading.

It was something which, every time I looked at it, I felt like I was (just ever so slightly)

turning my face from God,

And all of the beautiful things God had given as amazing gifts in my life.

Then, still in my pajamas, my hair still all messed up from the pillow, I walked outside.

What I thought was an entirely random move,

I went and grabbed a rock from the dirt,
and I smashed it.

I never do that. I don't break things. Always seemed a little melodramatic to me.

But that was the urge I felt overcome, that morning, so that's what I did.

I wonder if you can imagine, for a moment, what sits at the side of the parsonage.

If you can get a visual in your mind, of the parking lot, beside the green house, over there.

Kneeling in the dirt, looking up from that shattered,

demolished thing, the wind gently blowing, I held one of three smaller rocks.

All sitting beside a single, bulging boulder, over the dirt.

And I nearly fell back.

The situation was so bizarre to me, I actually started looking around.

Like someone was up to mischief. ...And I know someone was.

I don't imagine for an instant that God had brought that dream to me

when I was 17 years old, just to match up with the moment

I'd later be smashing this small thing at the side of the house I later lived in as a minister.

But I do know God was speaking to me loudly on Thursday morning.

I do know that that strange coincidence was one of beautifully divine meddling.

In that moment, as I stood there, with one of those three rocks in my hand,

I knew that God was reminding me of the fact that it's God who brings me any place I'll go.

That it's okay---that no matter all of the clutter we walk through,

in this often dry and barren desert of life,

that can sometimes be so hard to get through and still find ourselves
safe and clean past all of the mess.

--We travel through every moment in the warmth of the light of God.

And we are never alone.

And in that moment, I was washed over with God's peace.

And I thanked God. Over and over. For responding to me.

For seeing me through. And for calling me home.

---For once again, picking me up from a crumpled place,
and leading me ahead into whatever comes next.

With the promise of God's company through every step.

From there, I shook the dirt from my shoes and went into the study,
 knowing I still needed to send Katriena the lectionary materials for Sunday.
 Hadn't seen them yet. ...And what were they?
 From Exodus 17....This story of God's people wandering through the desert.
 Confused, and tired, and afraid.
 ---Moses, striking the rock! And bringing that water.
 That surety of life, to all of those people so lost and thirsty.

And from there, to that long story from John,
 Telling us that God is the only source of constant relief from this world.
 The story of the Samaritan woman dipping from well,
 And Jesus telling her of the truth that the things of this world come and go,
 and the only real satisfaction we will ever find in this life comes from God and God
 alone.
 He then tells the woman to give testimony to what she saw and heard,
 so that others might hear and know the truth of the peace and glory of God
 here and waiting for anyone willing to let God in,
 And drink from that *living* water which satisfies beyond any temporary thing----
 ---that holy presence of God which comforts us forever.

Friends, there's something inside of us...
 ... something that pulls us out. ...A yearning. A desire. ...It's quiet. But it's powerful.
 It's our urge---our *need*---to be close to our God.
 To that Life which formed us and is forming us still.

That need to be with God is just as natural as our thirst for water.

We so often get distracted by the smaller things of this world.

To the point that we lose focus, and we drift away

from the love which guides us and leads us home.

--To that surety, and strong footing of the shore.

During this season of Lent, (and any day, really)

there will be times when we're far from God, and times we're close.

But God waits for us, and calls us, wherever we are,

to return to the only real source of peace we'll ever know.

As we walk through the dry deserts of the world---

--a life that so often leaves us feeling empty, and lost, and in need---

---remember God, and let God fill you, and satisfy you, and guide you through each step.

Find *rest* in God---your rock and your stronghold---

--and let the light of God warm you, and keep you forever,

above all of those smaller things which will eventually pass away.

Amen.