



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

April 9, 2021

DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Source: Anita Szabo

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

In my understanding, a great number of us yearn to feel that we are a part of a bigger picture; that there is Someone who is mightier than we are, and therefore able to help us in challenges that overpower us by their nature. Even many of those who haven't been born into the Christian faith – either before or in Common Era – developed belief systems to deal with the big questions of life and death.

It varies for each of us where we sense more the presence of the Holy One. For the people of the Old Testament, altars built for the Almighty, like Bethel were the places where people **“called on the name of the Lord”** (Genesis 12:8) **“and inquired of God”** (Judges 20:18) For the people of Exodus, the tabernacle provided a visible sign of God's presence during their wondering in the wilderness. In the time of Jesus, it was the Temple in Jerusalem where people made pilgrimages to meet God.

In our Christian faith, we are told that Jesus made us possible to meet and to talk to God anywhere and any time. It has a great significance when Matthew states that **“the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”** (Matthew 27:51) That curtain separated humans from the Most Holy Place, where God was present, and only the high priests were allowed to enter that place, only at given times of the year.

The sacrifice of Jesus ended this separation. In him, we have a **“high priest”**, who can **“empathize with our weaknesses”** and because of whom we may **“approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Apostle Paul goes even further when he writes: **“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”** (1 Corinthians 6:19) This means that in every moment of our lives, wherever we are, God is there with us! It is a great comfort, especially in this pandemic time, when we were forced to postpone gathering in person, and to temporarily close the church buildings.

However, I believe there are places and times where and when we can be more aware of the divine presence with us. Just as people in the ancient times went to the altars to 'meet God', we also need places and times where we can hear God's still voice.

Which place is it for you, where you go to meet God? Or as Genesis puts it: **“the place where God had talked”** (Genesis 35:15) with you?

Whether it is in nature, or as we meet for worship services, I trust that you give yourself a chance to hear God's call to come near to the Holy One. That **“by believing you may have life in his name.”** (John 20:31)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



“Thin Places”

The cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

Exodus 40:38

READ Exodus 40:34–38

On January 28, 1986, the US Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart seventy-three seconds after takeoff. In a speech of comfort to the nation, President Reagan quoted from the poem “High Flight” in which John Gillespie Magee, a World War II pilot, had written of “the high untraversed sanctity of space” and the sense of putting out his hand to touch “the face of God.”

Although we can’t literally touch God’s face, we sometimes experience a stunning sunset or a place of meditation in nature that gives us an overwhelming sense that He’s near. Some people call these moments “thin places.” The barrier separating heaven and earth seems to grow a little thinner. God feels a little closer.

The Israelites may have experienced a “thin place” as they sensed the nearness of God in the desert wilderness. God provided a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night to lead them through the desert (Exodus 40:34–38). When they were staying in the camp, “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (v. 35). Throughout all their travels, they knew God was with them.

As we enjoy the incredible beauty of God’s creation, we grow conscious that He’s present everywhere. As we talk with Him in prayer, listen to Him, and read the Scriptures, we can enjoy fellowship with Him anytime and anywhere. – By **Cindy Hess Kasper**

REFLECT & PRAY

Father, help me to seek and find You even when I’m lost in a desert wilderness. Amen.

What places in nature make you feel especially close to God? How can you seek Him anytime and anywhere?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

The tabernacle (tent of meeting) was the place where God dwelled (Exodus 25:8). The book of Exodus devotes many chapters to this portable sanctuary that served as a place of worship in the desert and in Israel until Solomon built the temple. In Exodus 24–31 instructions for the tabernacle’s structure and its furnishing are given in minute detail. Then in chapters 35–40 we read how all these directions were carried out by the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Exodus 39:32–40:37 details the dedication of the tabernacle. It was completed according to God’s directions to Moses in the beginning of the second year after the Israelites escaped out of Egypt (40:2, 17). When everything was in place, the cloud covered the tabernacle where God’s glory dwelled (v. 34). The cloud had directed the Israelites’ travels throughout their wilderness wanderings (vv. 34–38; see 13:21; Nehemiah 9:12, 19).

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