

The Presence of God



Can we recognize and appreciate the presence of God in the ordinary things of life? For example, in beauty and ugliness, suffering and joy, meeting with friends and strangers, in the feel of a fowl's soft feathers and even in the not so ordinary scams that stress us when we are using the internet?

Sometimes we might delight to stop and gaze at the beauty of a sunset or sunrise, or a particular flower. At other times, all we might see around us is rubbish or a horrible mess we want to avoid.

The other morning I was walking down our driveway when a vibrant orange colour caught my eye. In amongst the leaf litter and grass under the gum trees, I saw a glowing leaf lying on the ground. It was briefly lit by the sun shining between some trees. I stopped to wonder and appreciate it.

Beauty in nature can appear in many places. It is part of our world, ready as God's presence, to lift our spirits and encourage us to give thanks to God. Animals also offer pleasure and comfort with their acceptance of us, and being there to hold and handle when Covid-19 restricts our touching of humans. However, there are times in our daily lives when we tend to overlook God's presence in nature, animals and the people surrounding us.

In Mark 6:1-13 we have a story of Jesus returning to Nazareth and the people he grew up with and served as a carpenter. They thought they knew Jesus and his family well, but to their surprise, on this visit, Jesus suddenly stood up on the Sabbath and began to teach them in the synagogue.

The people did not know how to respond. How could this young man who was one of them teach them anything? What would he know? They were not prepared to listen to Jesus or learn from what he said. After all, most of them believed they knew more than he did, they were older and had had more experience. Further, he was only a carpenter like his father, not a trained rabbi. The people were not open to receive anything from Jesus.

What sort of openness do we need to learn from familiar people or places? Are we open to gratefully receive God's love and care in our everyday environment? How can experiences in ordinary places teach us anything?

When we are tired or stressed, we can forget that God is with us where we are. There always seems to be a place where we can find God's presence if we are open to look.

Services I have taken at Aged Care Facilities can be a little chaotic and distracting. I sometimes have asked myself, how can this group of people know the presence of God when someone is calling out or muttering, and people are moving in or out of the room?

On the other hand, there is a deeper presence pervading all. These people I am privileged to join for a short time, accept and respect each other. They have families and friends they love, but they value this time of worship together as residents and members of God's family. It is an opportunity for them to be Christ's body where they are, to receive God's love and to pray for one another and all in need. I have experienced God's love and presence as very real in such gatherings, lifting me out of current worries and stress.

When we have the chance to share the suffering of others, or are invited to reveal our own pain to someone, what really matters? Is it not God's love that is present in the sharing?

Each day when we come to a meal, perhaps with the same ingredients as we had that day last week, we often give thanks to God and pray that others can

have the food they need. Do we also give thanks for the animals and plants that provide our food?

We might remember how Jesus was given a little bread and fish, a boy's ordinary lunch, and it became more than enough to feed a hungry crowd (John 6:1-21). What was left over was respectfully collected.

At night when we lie down to sleep, we have the opportunity to give thanks for all that has happened to us during the past day. We may have experienced stressful and painful moments, as well as small thoughtful acts of care. Perhaps a stranger we passed in the street smiled at us, acknowledging our being. The opportunity we have to be safe and warm in bed is also something for which we can thank God.

In our daily lives, we are never to underestimate other people, ourselves or nature. We are all part of God's creation where God's presence can be found. Such a presence is revealed when we are open to it, and observe the beauty of the kingdom of God breaking into our world.

As humans, we have the freedom to pause, notice and give thanks to God and others for what we see and experience, or to look elsewhere and hurry on to our next activity. When we avoid such glimpses, we may unknowingly prevent God's presence from reaching through us to others. Like a leaf lit by the sun, we can each day choose to allow God's light to reveal the beauty of God's love in our world for everyone, including ourselves.

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