

Where Have You Seen God at Work, Lately?

Exodus 3:1-6

Sermon notes from the pulpit of
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Exodus 3:1-6 ¹Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

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Where have you seen God at work lately?

I've asked you that question many times. I'll ask you again (and again), I promise. I think it's an important question.

For many of us, "seeing God at work" requires almost x-ray vision. We have to look real hard, very hard. For others of us, it's a good question with an easy answer: Everywhere. We see God is at work everywhere. Everywhere I look, I see God at work.

Old Moses saw the burning bush shining bright with light. It was burning bright, but it wasn't burning up. The fire seemed like a set of concrete logs on a gas fireplace. The fire was burning, but it wasn't burning anything up.

Moses was curious, naturally. Naturally, Moses wanted to see more, to get a closer look. What an odd thing. What an amazement. It's a trick. It's some slight-of-hand. *It's a miracle.*

Where have you seen God at work, lately?

Hold that thought...

The New York Times reported last week that the rest of the industrialized world has become more secular for the last half century. The United States has moved more slowly, but we are rapidly catching up.^[1]

Some 40 million American adults once went to church but have [stopped going](#), mostly in the last quarter-century.

“More people have left the church in the last 25 years than all the new people who became Christians from the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening and Billy Graham crusades combined,” Davis and Graham write.

One could guess from these dismal statistics, that fewer people care to look for God anymore. I suggest these studies do NOT prove that. These studies prove that worship attendance is down. Church membership has spiraled way down, in general, in this country. Fewer and fewer people are attending mosque, church, and synagogue.

These studies do not prove people are less hungry for God. I suggest people are, in fact, hungry for God. I think we are as hungry for God as ever. I understand that fewer of us look to the institutional church when we are looking for God. Younger people, I’m told, see a church that cares more about the nation than the kin-dom of God. Younger generations, I read, see the church as a place where racism is quietly fostered and rewarded. They see a church where outsiders who don’t fit into traditional boxes aren’t always welcomed in. You have to be deaf not to have heard hateful things from American pulpits.

[i]n 2001, [Rev. Jerry] Falwell and the Rev. Pat Robertson Robertson [suggested](#) that the Sept. 11 terror attacks were God’s punishment for the behavior of feminists, gay people and secularists.

In the 1960’s, white pastors made a case for separate but equal when it came to black churches and white churches. In the 12th century, the church preached a message encouraging the overthrow of Muslim-held land in Jerusalem and beyond. In the 1930’s and 40’s, German preachers spoke of a national church and of a pure race, where the differently-abled, blacks, gays, Jews, and others didn’t fit it.

In other words, the Christian church hasn’t always been very Christian. And younger generations, for these and other complex reasons, have shied away from organized religion.

But that doesn’t mean the world isn’t hungry for God. It is true, people in the west aren’t in great numbers seeking God at church. But they are, I think, seeking God. There’s a space in us that only God can fill. Augustine wrote in his Confessions, *“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”*

We are restless for God. We are incomplete without God. We ache to love God and to love neighbor. We ache to be part of God’s idea of a community where radical welcome is the rule, love is the ethic, joy is the song, justice is the work, peace is goal.

The loss of religious community has far-reaching implications. Congregations are a crucial part of America’s social capital, providing companionship, food pantries and a pillar of community life. There’s also some evidence that religious faith is associated with increased [happiness](#) and [better physical and mental health](#).

One of the most thoughtful contemporary religious commentators, Russell Moore, an evangelical who is now editor of Christianity Today, bluntly acknowledges the challenges ahead.

“American Christianity is in crisis,” [Moore writes in his new book](#), “Losing Our Religion.” “The church is a scandal in all the worst ways.”

It seems to me—and I could be wrong, but I don’t think I am—it seems to me we need to tell the world where we have seen God at work lately. Moses saw God in that burning bush.

I look around and see fire everywhere.

I see God through the ministry of this church.

Rachel and I took three or four boxes of food to the Daily Kitchen. These were leftovers from our Second Sunday Brunch. A guy met us on the sidewalk. He thanked us. What was it? It was hot sausage links, chilled fruit, and pastries. What was it? *It was manna*. Just a few boxes of leftover food. That’s your generosity at work. Within 90-minutes that food had filled hungry people.

Where have you seen God at work lately?

Look at the Daily Kitchen. How many paid staff do they have? None. How many days do they feed per week? Seven. How many days were they closed during the pandemic? None. Not one.

How can one NOT see God at work when one looks at the Daily Kitchen? And at DREAM? And at our Mission Coworkers all over the world? And at the work of Habitat for Humanity? And at the sanctuary provided by SAFE House? And Salt and Light? And at our ELL Program?

You don’t need to look at the church to see what God’s up to. But you can. I think God is at work everywhere, including in this church. Sure, we can do better and be better as a church, but our shortcomings don’t prevent God from being God.

God is at work. *Everywhere*.

And people are hungry to join in God’s work. They want to connect with something bigger than themselves. And, sure, many are connecting outside of the bounds of what we recognize as traditional church. But they are eager to connect with God, nevertheless. I suspect that they are as hungry as ever.

Where have you seen God at work, lately?

Joe Lundy, you’re our new associate pastor. Look at **these people**. These beloved ones are Jesus’ flock in this place. They are the stewards of God’s ministry in this place. Watch them. And watch out. Just about everywhere they go, I see God at work.

Thank you, First Pres. Thank you for being you. Thank you for the work you are doing.

Thanks be to God.

^[1] America Is Losing Religious Faith, NYT, Opinion, Aug. 23, 2023, Nicholas Kristof.