

Choices

From the Bible: Joshua 24: 14-16

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February 28, 2016

It all started with a conversation.

Well, actually a text.

My phone vibrating on my desk with a message: *Do you have 30 minutes sometime this week to talk?* Home on Christmas break, a college student wanted to know if he could stop by and talk with me for a few minutes. We had talked before as he worked through the pressures of growing up and trying to have his faith and values grow up, as well. This last conversation was one more step in that *growing up* process.

There were moments in his life, he said, when he had a very real sense of God's presence.

At the time of his grandfather's death.

When, in a difficult situation, he had sensed and received help and strength.

But, not always.

Other times it was hard for him to find or connect with that which he knew and named as God.

He wondered (and asked!), what he was missing or doing wrong and what he needed to do in order to experience that loving, supportive presence of God more often.

Don't we all wonder that at one time or another?

Wouldn't it be nice to walk around each day surrounded by an uplifting sense of the Holy which elevates you above the mess of today rather than getting up each morning and having to plunge into the mundane and sometimes craziness of the day in, day out routine?

Diapers to change.

Dishes to wash.

Decisions to make.

Work to do.

Little of which feels very much like God.

At least most of the time.

At least to me.

A second conversation then followed up on the first.

This next conversation took place a little more than a week ago with the group of high school students and adults as we were wrapping up our week of living and working in the community of Campuzano in Nicaragua. We were talking about what the week had meant and about coming home and about how you hold onto and bring back with you some of what was so real and so powerful and so meaningful when you were there.

We were asking the question:

Why is it so easy to care when you are there and it gets harder when you come home?

Why is it so easy to accept those who are different from you there and harder here?

Why is it so easy to work hard and to be dirty and to not worry what you look like or what clothes you are wearing there, then when it is when you walk into school?

Why does caring and compassion and kindness come so naturally and feel so right when you are there and become so elusive when you are back at school or at work?

Both conversations ask the same question.

How do I...

How do we...

Hold onto...

Stay in touch with...

What seems so right.

So real.

So much of God.

In those moments when God seems close?

The response I gave in both conversations was this.

You can't.

Or, at least, I don't know how to do it.

Sure there are those practices and disciplines which connect us better to God.

Prayer. Meditation. Worship. Service to others.

But, you can't automatically manufacture that feeling of God.

What you can do is appreciate those moments when you experience them and name them for what they are and remember them and draw strength from them when they do happen.

And, you can use them to help point you in the right direction which may be what is most important.

Despite what or how you feel in any particular moment, you can make that choice.

You may not always feel compassion and kindness, but you can always choose compassion and kindness.

You may not always want to welcome the other, but you can still choose to extend hospitality.

You may want to scream and shout and point fingers and blame others, but you can choose to speak and act with respect even when there is profound disagreement.

You may not always feel God is close, but you can always choose God.

Choose to walk with God.

Choose to live the way God would have you live.

Choose to practice the values wrapped up in your understanding of God.

Choose to believe that God is at work in your life and our world.

Choose to believe that you are called to be partners with God in the work God is doing.

Which brings us back to Joshua.

That Jewish Patriarch who assumed leadership of the people after the death of Moses and who led the Jewish people out of the wilderness and across the Jordan River and into the land they understood to be promised to them by God.

Here, at the end of his life, he summons the people of Israel to Shechem.

To the most holy place he knew.

After reminding them of their history, he challenges them with this:

"Choose this day whom you will serve."

After Egypt and exodus.

After wandering in the wilderness and now having a place to call home.

Choose God or something else.

It is your choice to make, but you do have to decide.

That question is our question, as well.

Choose this day whom you will serve.

We may not always feel God's presence, but we can always choose God.

It is a choice we make each and every day.
Sometimes multiple times each day.

God or...

Compassion or...

Kindness or...

Respect or...

Peace or...

Justice or...

You decide.