

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

November 1, 2020

Lesson 9

Sacred Spaces

Genesis 8:20-21; 12:6-8; 28:16-22; 1 Samuel 7:10-12

After the flood, Noah built an altar to worship God (Genesis 8:20-21). I think I would have been more likely to blame God for making me stay on board with those smelly animals.

Abram built an altar simply based on God's promise to give him the land for Abram's descendants (Genesis 12:6-8). I think I would have been more likely to make sure God delivered on the promise before I did much worshiping.

Jacob used a rock for a pillow and then dreamed what God had to say to him; he recognized that that ordinary place was actually a place of God's presence (Genesis 28:16-22). I think I would have been more likely to wait until I got in my pew at Bethany to make sure I was on holy ground.

When the Israelite army routed the Philistines, Samuel gave God the credit and built an altar of stone and called it "Ebenezer" (meaning "stone of help"; 1 Samuel 7:10-12). I think I would have been more likely to think, "What a great general I am; my army has won the day." (Well, at least I learned what the hymn writer meant when he wrote, "Here I raise mine Ebenezer.")

After reading the focal passages for this week's lesson, I began to think if there were unexpected, out-of-the-ordinary places where I had worshiped God. Yes! There was summer church camp when the expected worship moment came at vespers, but the unexpected time of worship came when a counselor told me that I was still okay even though I was the only kid at camp who did not know how to swim. There was the walk back to the house from the mailbox as I read a handwritten note from my teenaged grandson, telling me how much he loved me. Then, there was the time a romantic tryst became a time of praising God when Toni and I agreed to spend the rest of our lives together as husband and wife.

No place is off limits for God's activity. Even if we have wandered into far places, the prevenient grace of God can find us. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "God of working grace, come and find me where I am and move me to where you would have me be."

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