

Presentation Year C  
2/2/2025

Do you ever wonder – as I often do – why it is that God seems so much more present in the lives of folks in Scripture than in our current times? I realize that Scripture is the account of our history with God, more specifically a series of accounts of how God has saved us from ourselves time and time again: Salvation History, it's often referred to by folks who know more than I do. Of course, those who compiled Scripture intentionally searched for material that most vividly described our encounters with God, but it just seems as though God is around every corner “back then” and not so much anymore.

You know how it is when you go to Hannaford's or Shaw's looking for something very specific, let's say tart cherry juice, no-added-sugar. I'm sure they don't have it; I've never seen anything like that there; we'll have to go to the Co-Op and it'll be a tiny bottle and cost an arm and a leg. And there it is on the shelf, in the aisle with kids' juice boxes. Who would have thought! If you go looking, you will most likely find. Or if you don't find, you're not looking hard enough. Or you might need another pair of eyes, so why not ask for help? Or maybe it isn't there at all.

As people of faith and disciples of Jesus Christ, we are participants in the saga of Salvation History, in fact along with God, the main participants. We believe God gave our ancestor, Moses, specific instructions on how we should live and behave towards one another righteously. “Righteousness” has morphed into a word which can have an unpleasant taste of arrogance or over-piousness, but Scripture uses it to describe a lifestyle in sync with God's desires for us: a right relationship with God. If ten commandments weren't enough, they were written in stone. And if that's not enough, there's an entire book – Deuteronomy, the second law – which goes into minute detail about how those Ten Written in Stone are to be interpreted, every aspect of how to live according to God's commandments: our going out, our coming in, our eating, our sleeping, what happens if we mess up, how we answer to our neighbor. Christians use the Ten Commandments to guide our lives, but instead of adding further explanation in the form of a book, we summarize them into two: the first and greatest, and the second. Our book of annotations comes in the form of baptism, where we are put on the spot to make promises about how we will live, and we close each answer, acknowledging that we can't do it alone, “with God's help.”

To the question, “where is God?” or “why does God just sit there and not do anything?” the answers are “here, there and everywhere” and “God IS actively

involved.” These days it seems we only look for God when our lives are falling apart. Kind of like the family car: there’s a rattle that didn’t used to rattle, there’s a tiny crack in the windshield, one of the daytime headlights is out. But when the brake light comes on, we can’t get to the service guys fast enough.

Perhaps rather than thinking of that little phrase “with God’s help” as a possible loophole, we should think of it as our preventive maintenance mantra.

This morning is all about giving ourselves to God. Or shall we say, giving up ourselves to God, giving up our wills in place of God’s: thy will be done on earth, we pray. As your only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple, so may we be presented to you by Jesus Christ our Lord.

We don’t see God because we don’t look for God. Our default is not God. Our automatic Go To is not God. Our Go To is money, investments, stocks and bonds, real estate, our businesses, our super-human heroes, car dealerships, Amazon, movie stars, our television and radio stations who deliver the good or bad news about our political heroes or enemies. If we enjoy a personal victory, the last person we thank is God. On a recent episode of Jeopardy Tournament of Champions, the contestants were asked if they wanted to thank anyone publicly: first guy, long list, including fifth grade science teacher; second, long list including husband who “put up with me” especially for all these months; third guy short list “and most especially thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” Why, oh why did that sound so strange to me? Because God and Jesus just are not in our public vocabulary. Lately, I’ve been rethinking my fear of being called a religious crazy, that as long as I’m within a sacred space or standing here preaching, singing hymns or leading a service, I’m safe. Instead, let’s all get into the habit of using our preventive maintenance mantra - I will with God’s help - and call upon our Lord with thanksgiving and praise when we find the tart cherry juice, no-sugar-added on the supermarket shelves. With God’s help, I can respectfully bring God into ordinary conversation, not to impose my beliefs but to remind myself and those around me of God’s presence. Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice; rejoice in everything, Paul tells us. God IS active, God IS everywhere; and if we look, we will see God’s face reflected in the face of a neighbor or stranger or even someone we don’t much like. Let us be presents to Jesus – both here in the courts of the Lord and in our daily lives - thanking God for Jesus’ presence among us, thanking God for our lives, even when they seem to be falling apart. Let us thank God for each other, for the love we give, for the love we receive.

O Lord of hosts, happy are they who put their trust in you.