

Sabbath: Finding God on the Road
Psalm 150
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So even if you weren't part of the fun this week, I think you may have guessed our Vacation Bible School theme -- Everest.

Climbing Mt. Everest is something of the ultimate journey – an adventure or challenge that most of us wouldn't even contemplate. It works beautifully as a VBS theme because it conjures for the kids images of rugged and dangerous hikes where we can fully experience a need to depend on God.

But to find God on the road, I don't think we need to climb Mt. Everest. I imagine that many of us are dreaming of a different kind of vacation – time at a favorite lake house or beach perhaps? Some much needed downtime, whether here at home or on the road.

Whenever we can get that much-needed vacation – it's a chance to break with the routines of home – to notice things that we might not otherwise see. And it's a time to be with God in new and different ways.

Of course, there is nothing that says we HAVE to go away to find God. I think there's a reason, however, that many of the world's religions encourage some version of a pilgrimage.

People used to do pilgrimages for a variety of reasons. They would seek out a holy place – a shrine or a cathedral that housed a relic from one of the saints. They would walk as a form of penance OR maybe as a way to thank God for something. I have to imagine that, for pilgrims, the journey mattered just as much as the destination.

And so I wonder: when we are away from the normal routines of home, can we create the “in between space” of a pilgrimage¹? And can that time and space with God help us return home, refreshed and better able to live joyful

¹ Egan, Kerry. **Fumbling**. Doubleday, 2004. Page 18.

and faithful lives? I think it can. Whether our “holy place” is Disney World or the Grand Canyon...a second home up north or an Adirondack chair in our backyard – our summer journeys can become pilgrimages, time and places where we go expecting to meet God, and spend some time with God, along the way.

We can learn from those pursuing more traditional pilgrimages. For example, Kerry Egan writes of her pilgrimage along Spain’s Camino de Santiago. Her destination was a cathedral housing a saint’s bones, but her book says very little about the destination. Instead, she describes the journey. Egan walked from southern France into Spain for reasons that she couldn’t fully articulate. She had just graduated from Harvard Divinity School, so she was certainly used to articulating her understanding of God – she had probably written numerous papers and read any number of books about God.

But when Egan started walking, she realized that despite a religious upbringing and a seminary education, she hadn’t really encountered God. She writes: “I didn’t have too much experience of God, or at least any I bothered to pay attention to and was able to recognize as the presence of God.”²

While walking day after day, Egan experienced God for real. And Egan realized that she was angry with God, and still grieving from her father’s death, and so her journey became a time to make peace and to prepare to return to her life a changed person.

When we travel, we also realize how much we rely on God. A dear friend of mine, Wendy Matthewson, preached at my ordination on Psalm 139. She shared that, on family car trips as a child, her father would reach into the glove compartment of the station wagon, and read the words of the Psalm from an old page, printed on a dot matrix printer.

² Egan, Kerry. **Fumbling**. Doubleday. Page 50.

¹O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

³You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

When Wendy was in college she spent a semester in Scotland. When the family came to see her off at O'Hare, her dad reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out that same dot matrix-printed Psalm.

⁷Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Away from the safety of home, we are reassured by God's presence.

Away from the safety of home, we can perhaps experience God's presence in a way that's more real.

It's not an accident that so many Bible stories take place in the desert. In the Bible, people often had to travel long distances across barely inhabited lands. People like Abraham and Sarah or Hagar and Ishmael encountered God in the desert.

A colleague of mine who spent a summer volunteering on the border of Texas and Mexico, ensuring that water jugs were full and accessible to those

who needed water shared with me the deep awareness of God that she felt each and every day. She said, “you’re just so painfully aware of how much you rely on God in the desert. You don’t know where you’re going to find food or water...it’s hotter than you’ve ever been. You rely on God in ways you don’t have to at home.

And when we experience God --- truly experience God, we respond with joy and praise!

And so I hope that you can keep that in mind as we continue to talk about Sabbath this summer. No matter how graciously we talk about Sabbath, I worry that there is always going to be someone who hears me say Sabbath and immediately thinks that I’m lecturing. That I’m expecting us all to follow a list of rules for a set time and day each week. Let me be clear – that’s not why God gave us the Sabbath!

God gave us the Sabbath to ensure rest, not rules!³ And I think that when we rest. When we take time to simply be, and to be, we can BE with God and enjoy God and God’s spectacular creation.

That’s what our Psalm this morning is about. When I talk with our children about the Psalms, I call them the “heart” of the Bible. First, because they are right in the middle and second, because the Psalms provide a kind of emotional core. They include the full range of human emotions and this time the predominate emotion is joy!

The writers of the Psalms cry out to God, in prayer, poem and song. It’s fitting that this is the final Psalm we have because everything seems to culminate here! Psalm 150 urges everything that moves and breathes to praise God! It doesn’t say that only humans can praise God or only grown-ups or only those who read their Bibles regularly. EVERYONE gets to praise God!

³ As Pastor Chris says!

And then it tells us that we can praise God with the noise of instruments and it mentions this odd cacophony of noise – trumpet sounds, lute and harp, and the crash of cymbals! Note that Psalm 150 says nothing about praising God through masterful organ playing like our own Jill Hunt does. AND it says nothing about praising God through lively and beautiful guitar playing like our own Kimberlee Frost. EVERYBODY can praise God through music, not just the professionals.

Two weeks ago, I preached on the first Psalm --- now we're hearing the final one. I didn't explicitly plan it this way, but I kind of like it. One scholar suggests -- If we look upon the Book of Psalms as a journey through a life of faith with both elements of lament and praise intermingled (the final few psalms) represent the end of such a life...Psalm 150 is the great conclusion to even that praise."⁴

Even though the Psalmist shares all these great ways we can praise God with noisy, joyful instruments, we don't need a thing to praise God.

We praise God with our bodies – we can use our bodies to serve, like our worktrippers have done this week – and we praise God simply by being. By being quiet and restful, and making Sabbath time.

We praise God with our voices. When we sing or laugh or use our voices to tell a joke or to comfort a friend, we praise God. We praise God with our lives. At Playground Church, we remind the kids that we praise God when we sing and pray AND we also praise God when we run, swing, and play.

Yes, we can praise and experience God anywhere! But I, for one, sometimes need a little help, and that's why I love the opportunity this summer to think about different ways of being with God.

⁴ Wallace, Howard. Psalm 150, The Old Testament Readings: Weekly Comments on the Revised Common Lectionary, Theological Hall of the Uniting Church, Melbourne, Australia

When we're on vacation, the rules change. For my family, lengthy flights and "are we there yet" car trips mean that the restrictions on iPads are abandoned as we seek to pass the time with movies and games. While on vacation, daily ice creams are the norm and bedtimes go by the wayside as we enjoy being in the moment. I love it! It's good for the soul to throw caution to the wind now and then and to live differently than we do at home. In the sermon, a child's sand pail was filled with the items listed on the bucket below so that we could experience them all!

Before you hit the road this summer, create your own summer “bucket list” with items such as:



*Inspired by ideas from blessachone.wordpress.com

Praise the LORD! Praise God with laughter and running.

Praise God with swimming and wading or by simply sitting and staring at a beautiful lake or ocean that God created for us.

Praise God with guitar, with singing and with noisemaking.

Praise God with bubbles and sidewalk chalk.

Praise God on car trips and airplanes.

Praise God with our bodies.

Praise God with our hearts and voices and minds.

Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

AMEN