

## **Sermon 20 June 2010 - "Connecting with God"**

**Wesley Uniting Church, Forrest, ACT**

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**1 Kings 19:8-13, Psalm 42, Galatians 3:23-29**

A few weeks ago I was having a coffee with one of our church members, and towards the end of our conversation I asked her "so how's God been treating you?". She looked up and immediately responded "Fabulous!".

Oh wow, what an answer. I asked her to unpack that a bit more and she told me how every day she has a sense of God being present with her and an awareness of being loved by God. "Fabulous" was my response to that.

Connecting with God is not always easy. Many a Christian, many a saint, has had periods in their life when God has seemed remote, when listening for God seems to bring no result, when we yearn for a word from God - a direction, a reassurance - but nothing comes.

Elijah was in trouble with his king, Ahab, and his queen, Jezebel. So he flees south, and finds himself eventually at Mt Horeb, which is an alternative name for Mt Sinai, the holy mountain where centuries before Moses had met in person with God and received God's commandments for the people of Israel. When God wants to meet with Elijah and give him directions for his future, God tells Elijah to stand in the front of the cave and watch for God to pass by. Elijah waits - and there's a great wind, then an earthquake, then a fire - but God was in none of those dramatic events. Then God comes to Elijah in the sheer silence, and it's then that Elijah must wrap his mantle over his face, for no-one, according to Hebrew understanding, can see God and live.

In the silence... in the still small voice. That's how God generally connects with us. It may be a whispering into our conscience, it may be a growing notion as we listen and listen, as we wait for God in the silence, that yes God is saying do this, use your talents in this way, show your compassion and love like this, be forgiving, act with grace.

The writer of Psalm 42 wants desperately to connect with God. He's been banished from Jerusalem, and he feels that God is no longer with him. He yearns to be back in the holy city, in the temple where he knows God is, and it's made all the worse for him because the locals up north taunt him continually "where is your God?!".

A few weeks ago I penned a few lines for the Pentecost edition of Windows, and shared four ways that work for me in seeking God's presence:

- remembering the times when God did indeed feel close to me, and allowing that memory to tune me into God again;
- reading a gospel story and imagining I'm there with Jesus;
- the bleeding obvious means of praying and asking God to come make his presence felt;
- being out in the bush, in God's creation, feeling the awesome presence of God.

Let me add three more things to that little list.

A fifth way of connecting with God is in fact to go to the special places where God is most experienced. Elijah goes to the sacred mountain in the wilderness of Sinai, the psalmist longs to be back in the temple singing praises to God. Jesus has taught us that God is present everywhere, available to us everywhere, but he too went to the temple and joined in worship in the synagogue. This church building and the experience of singing and praying and worshipping with our fellow-Christians can often connect us again with God.

A sixth way is to read the stories of people of faith. The stories of the saints of old have often inspired people and brought them into closer connection with God, as we discover how God has dealt with others. Tomorrow we have the funeral of Ian Paton, a member of this church for over 30 years, for a third of his life. Five years ago Ian wrote a book about his life, for his family and close friends, 200 copies only were printed. I didn't know of this book until this week, after Ian's death, but it tells an extraordinary story of a beautiful man of faith and courage, who packed about four careers into his life and gave amazing service to the community and the world. His exploits in the second world war as a pilot, and immediately prior to the war when he was a pacifist and a conscientious objector, leave me gobsmacked. In the postscript to his book he writes:

"I believe in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. My favourite text from the Bible is 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life'. I am a member of Wesley Uniting Church and also receive spiritual enrichment by attending a Taize group led by two Brigidine nuns".

Ian knew God in his life, deeply. Reading the story of his life has certainly connected me with God this week, through Ian's example.

But the most effective way of connecting with God, I believe, is to allow time for the sound of sheer silence - to wait on God for that still small voice to come to us in the silence. That's part of the attraction of late night prayers and of being out in the bush. It's in the silence that we most often sense God is with us.

Two final thoughts:

- One, being connected with God doesn't mean we'll be free of tough times, free of the hardships and challenges of human life. Just look at Elijah who sure had to deal with plenty of dangers and perils even though he was inspired by God. Note though, that being connected with God helps us immeasurably to deal well with life's challenges, for God's love and God's wisdom always become known to those who seek God's presence in their lives.
- And lastly, know that God wants to connect with us always. Not just so we can know we are loved by God and enjoy God, not just so we can receive God's help with our questions and our troubles - but so we can live every day in the way of obedience to God, so we can live with grace, with love, with peacefulness, with courage, with forgiveness, with self-giving service, so we can truly be followers of the Way of Christ.

To the glory of God. Amen.

Now let's take a few moments of silence, to reflect on how God connects with us.