

2023 09 03 – Deep Spirituality

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-15 (The Inclusive Bible)

For those you who haven't been able to be with us for the past two Sundays, I should let you know that we are just ending a three week series of sermons. During these three Sundays, we have been exploring the new call of The United Church of Canada. The United Church's call is very short. It is just three phrases, six words. So it's easy to remember:

Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice.

As members of the United Church of Canada we are being called to live our lives with Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship and Daring Justice. So here we are trying to get some understanding of what those phrases mean. So far we have looked at Daring Justice and Bold Discipleship and today we will be exploring the meaning of *Deep Spirituality*.

Spirituality is about experiencing the Holy Mystery, the Ground of Our Being, the Essence of Love, most often referred to as God or Spirit. Rob Fennell, a theologian in the United Church, says, "I think of spirituality as the ways we seek and receive God's love and grace in everyday life."

<https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/deep-spirituality-regular-people-us>

In today's scripture reading, Moses is having a spiritual experience, an encounter with God. This particular experience happens in the normal pattern of his day.

He's just taking care of his father-in-law's sheep—leading them farther into the hills, looking for vegetation on which they can feed. When all of a sudden Moses sees a bush that looks like it is burning but never seems to burn up. So Moses goes closer, to check it out. And when he does, God's voice calls out to him from the midst of the bush.

That's a pretty effective way to get someone's attention isn't it? Starting a fire in the midst of bush! What does it take to get your attention? What does it take for you to notice the presence of the Holy Mystery in your life? Let's say you are going about the normal tasks of your day: cleaning, washing, eating, paying bills, running errands, or going for a walk. What does it take to get your attention in the midst of a busy day?

A week or two ago, Patti and Rhonda and I were just beginning our workday, when Patti spoke in a loud, but not too loud voice, telling us to come quickly to the door. Both Rhonda and I hurried to find out what was happening. We were amazed to see a hummingbird drinking the nectar from the little pink flowers in the pots by the door. All three of us took that moment to revel in the beauty and the wonder of God's creation.

How often do you stop to watch and listen to what the Holy Spirit has to say? What are some of the things that will make you stop and realize that you are not alone? It can be something from nature or something quite different (wait for an answers: silence of the prairie coulee, song of a bird, a baby's laughter, flutter of a butterfly, coyote howling, a full moon, falling stars, a book, a poem, a movie).

As Rob Fennell suggests, many of these moments can happen in the midst of a normal day, if we just open our hearts and our minds to God's presence, if we just watch and listen.

Many people go on pilgrimages hoping to find the sacred in particular geographic locations in our world. Many theologians and mystics tell us that these thin places do exist: mountaintops, the island of Iona, paths like the Camino de Santiago, ancient stone circles like Stonehenge or even buildings like St. Peter's Basilica. Pilgrimages are not wrong. In fact, taking periods of time away from our everyday lives to search for the Holy can be a good thing.

But the mystics also tell us that the best place to look for the sacred is within. For most of us, the best way of hearing the Holy Spirit is through prayer or meditation, whatever form that may take for you. I could be a contemplative walk, canoeing on a lake, regular prayer, silent meditation, or daily journaling. It could be listening to music, reading a book, or even attending Sunday Worship. All of these activities can help us to connect with the Ground of our Being.

It's one thing to experience the presence of God in our everyday lives, but it's another to understand and to respond to what the Holy Mystery is calling us to do. It's another thing to allow those experiences of the sacred to transform our lives and the lives of others. When our experience of God leads to us to take risks and to initiate change then we are actually living out what I would call deep spirituality.

Moses took the time to listen to the Holy Spirit and to truly comprehend what YHWH was saying to him. In fact, he understood the call so well that he began to question his ability to take it on saying, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?” “Who am I?” Moses had several doubts about his experience, his skills and his abilities. If we read further, we find out that he was particularly worried about his ability to speak in public.

How often have we felt the nudges of the Holy Mystery, been given opportunities to take on new things in our lives and then ignored them because we didn’t feel we had the ability, the time, the strength, the money or possibly the energy to follow this call?

Michael Blair, the United Church’s General Secretary, in a recent presentation to a group of church leaders in Regina, told this story that he had read years before, about a minister who was on retreat. While on retreat, this minister was talking to his spiritual director and complaining about the people in his congregation. He spent several minutes pouring out all his anger and his frustration. Eventually, his spiritual director responded saying, “it sounds like you are feeling like a barnyard pump and all these people are coming and pushing down on the handle of the pump and expecting you to provide them with water, and you resent that they are doing that to you. Well you need to realize that this is your calling. The problem is not that all these people are coming and cranking your handle looking for help and guidance, the problem is that your pipes are not deep enough.” The spiritual director then encouraged this minister to dig deep and to take time every day to be with his God. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVqJZj_19mE

It's not just ministers who sometimes feel overwhelmed or resentful when we are attempting to live out our call. We all need the benefits of deep spirituality. We all need the ability to put our pipes down deep and draw from the infinite well of God's love.

When Moses was struggling God said, "I am as I am." Scholars tell us that the Hebrew phrase translated as "I am," also means "I will be" or even "I will be there." In other words the verb indicates presence. Even through this name, YHWH is telling Moses that he will not be alone as he lives out his call. God will be with him, helping him to overcome his weaknesses, helping him to liberate his people, helping him to go beyond what he believes is possible.

This kind of connection with the sacred is Deep Spirituality. This is the kind of connection that is available to each and every one of us. Another minister named Russ Ewell, puts it this way:

Deep Spirituality is the personal, powerful, emotional, and intimate experience of God that allows us to exceed our human limits.

<https://deepspirituality.com/deep-spirituality/>

As members of The United Church of Canada, we are called to strive for a personal and powerful connection with the Ground of our Being. It is only with this Deep Spirituality that we will be able to live out our call as Bold Disciples of Jesus, creating Daring Justice in our world. May it be so. Amen.