

“Longing for God” by Kevin Barwick

August 9, 2015



The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

A story went like this: A man came up to God and said that he wanted to do something significant and important in life. He reminded God that “the Almighty” could move mountains and do miraculous things through him. He wanted to be of service. So God told him that he should start with a particular task. He told the man to push as hard as he could against this huge rock that sat on the edge of a cliff. The man was excited to finally be doing something important and meaningful. He was “getting the point.” His thoughts swelled in anticipation of accomplishing this task!

So each day the man went out to push against the huge rock to move it down the mountainside. But it didn’t budge an inch! He pushed against it for weeks, and still it didn’t move. He would complain to God, “I could use a little help here, God!” And God gently and persistently said that He was helping him. Months past to where the man became so frustrated in his lack of rock-movement, that he threw his hands up and vehemently complained to God. “You told me to push the damn rock, and that you would be with me the whole time. Nothing has happened! This was stupid preparation for doing something important for you!” God sighed, and seemed to breathe on the man, and said, “My son, you did well in pushing the rock. But you missed the point. I did not tell you to move the rock. I simply said to push on it.” The man broke in, “But nothing happened. Nothing changed!” God lovingly said to him, “Oh, but something did happen.” He placed a large mirror in front of the man, and

told him to look at himself. The man, in amazement, saw how he had changed. He changed from the inside out. His body took on a new stronger confident posture, reminding him that he was developing his inner strength. God said to him, "You focused on what you *thought* was important. And indeed, it is. But first you needed to know who you were, and develop your inner self. Then, and only then, maybe we can move some mountains..."

I hope my few words fall on your ears, not as my opinions, but as encouragement to develop an even deeper inner self. I encourage you to not so much judge what I say, (oh, that's not theologically sound, or hermeneutically correct), but rather listen from your heart, and glean what may prick you in some way. That's my prayer for today. May it be so.

The theme for this liturgical season is **Missing the Point**. I'm not sure if Celebration Circle was encouraging us to "not look for a point," or to intentionally find or make a point. In any case, I'm sure Celebration Circle would say, it means whatever it supposed to mean to you; which is so frustrating sometimes! Because I don't want to miss the Point! So... I will push the Rock!

I sometimes ask myself, "What am I missing?" What in my married life am I missing? What in my professional life am I missing? What in my spiritual life am I missing? There's a part of me that wants to turn on my Geiger counter, comb my internal beaches until [bam!] I found it. I usually, however, don't find it. What usually happens is that I'm reminded that I don't have to find it, i.e. maybe it's better that I'm left searching and longing for that which I pursue. I find it's the longing that's often the answer.

One of the areas that I'm pursuing these last few years, or maybe it seems to be haunting me more these days is my pursuit and longing of God's Presence. There is something so inviting, so intriguing, so frustrating about this Presence. I dare say, so sensual, and mysterious, and yet so fulfilling to experience being loved by the Great Lover. Psalm 42 says, *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

We all have different experiences, perspectives, feelings, and musings of this one called God. Maybe we're angry at God. Lonely or skeptical or

curious. The truth is that all are welcome. All are perfect. All are yours. I'd like to invite you to think and feel five words that capture how you are currently experiencing the Devine Presence. When you're ready, please turn to someone next to you and share your five words. [Say Pass , if needed.] Then find another person to share them.

What you just did was in part confessing God's existence in your life. I wonder if a couple of us would be willing to share your five words with the larger body?

I wonder if we might do that more at Seekers? [Pause] Forgive me if I sound like I'm judging our motives. But indulge me as I share some of my desires and/or observations. And I know I'm stepping on many toes at this point. But... stay open and keep pushing your rock. I know we experience some of these. But not much, as I see it. [Pause] Push the Rock.

As I see it, it seems that we are really good at serving outwardly. And not so good at sharing our spiritual lives. In other words, What is God doing in our lives? What are our challenges? Where are we deeply called to? Do we occasionally try to bring that into our conversations? When we pray (perhaps on Sunday mornings), do we *explain* first to God who this person is before we ask for God's blessing? When we share in mission groups, is it always a report of what's happening, or what we long for, desire, afraid of, what we're learning, etc.? When we confess, are we confessing to God or to each other? If each other, why do we keep our eyes closed? Why not look at each other? Lest we (or I) sound too much like an evangelical, why do we not talk about Christ very much, or the Christ in all of us? It's fine that we have a kaleidoscope of faith and interests. And

I'm not saying we need to spout off a "Praise Jesus," but every once in a while remind us of practicing why we are doing what we do in the name of Christ. In all honesty, my deeper fear is that we will *do* religion more than follow the teachings of Jesus.

I'm not saying that we should change anything. I am saying that I hope we stay fresh with who we are as followers of Christ, i.e. that we don't live a domesticated, tamed, and therefore, complacent faith. I hope that we do all we can do to be real in our faith, in our community, in our practices, in our

ministries, in our relationships. Let's not be *stuck* in tradition, that we lose sight of needs possibly right around us. Let's be willing to express a living faith within these walls (not an assumptive faith), in Takoma Park and beyond. Let's be willing to keep pushing the rock, and thereby listen deeply for God.

I close with an invitation from Hafiz entitled *The God Who Only Knows Four Words*.

Every Child

Has Known God,

Not the God of names,

Not the God of don'ts.

Not the God who ever does

Anything weird,

But the God who knows only four words

And keeps repeating them, saying:

"Come dance with me,"

Come Dance!