

The Extraordinary in the Ordinary
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The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

“There came a sound like the rush of a violent wind that filled the entire house...divided tongues as of fire appeared among them...all of them were filled with the holy spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability...” (Acts 2:2-4).

Well that’s pretty darn extraordinary. I for one, lead a bit more of an ordinary life. So, for a person like me, perhaps like you, what might motivate our sense of God, our sense of the Holy, our ability to experience God’s extraordinary presence in our ordinary lives. How do we have that profound encounter with God, if we haven’t had any tongue of fire blowing through our houses lately?

Ages 8 to 12 I lived in Hawai’i. My dad is a retired Lt. Col. in the Marine Corps and we were stationed there. It has to have been my most favorite place I lived as a child. It certainly shaped and formed me. [Hats off to Drew, I know that is his home and I know how special it is to him.]

My first moment of transcendence came late afternoon one summer evening on Waimea bay. Some of you may know of Waimea Bay, it’s an iconic beach on the North shore on the island of Oahu, and in the winter, when the swell is right it can have some of the most amazing, challenging surfing in the world. This past January, whoa, (Here’s the link if you are reading this on line: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZqxPozl2Ec>) it was nothing short of epic.

But the day I remember was when I was about 10 years old. It was summer, and it was dead flat. We had been snorkeling. It was my family’s pattern on Sundays to go to Mass at 8:00 am and then pack the rambler station wagon and go to two different beaches that my brother Kevin and I had chosen. I remember on that day, everyone else had gone back in to the beach, but I decided to stay out. The sun was going down. And it left a trail of gold on the face of the water. I decided to turn my boogie board into the sun and paddle out as far as I could.

What I remember is being filled with awe, feeling as if I were following a path to God. I remember the liquid gold reflecting on the blue water as I passed my hands through. I was suffused with a sense of peace and strength and amazement at the beauty of the incredibly vast gorgeous world. I must have paddled about 15 minutes before I turned my board around and went safely back to shore. That sense of transcendent awe has stayed with me.

Some of you may know that I’m a sea kayaker. I love paddling sea kayaks and I also professionally guide sea kayaking trips, train instructors and coach sea kayaking in venues

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around the world. (In my spare time!) In cool places like Baja, Scotland, New Zealand, Canada and right here in Michigan on our inland seas. It's something of a passion for me.

I must admit, that I come the closest to encountering that transcendence I experienced as a child in Hawai'i when I am in my sea kayak paddling perhaps amidst the cliffs and caves, skerries and stacks and tiny islands off the Shetland islands in Scotland, or on Lake Superior or Lake Michigan, particularly when the clear aquamarine water, passes over the sandstone boulders, or when I travel along the cliffs of Pictured Rocks in the Upper Peninsula. I have a sense of Awe. That feeling of being suffused with wonder and amazement.

That's one part, one leg of my experience of God in the ordinary. Another part of feeling connected to God is when I have a sense of agency, a confidence in my ability to act, to use the gifts God has given me to get something done, to make a difference, or to continue the sea kayak theme, to gracefully move my boat, in dynamic waters, dodging waves, and cliffs and reveling in paddling fast enough to catch a wave and experience the raw power of God's world.

This raw power brings me to a third way I experience the Holy: acceptance. For me finding God, that is experiencing the extraordinary in the ordinary is a combination of *awe*, *agency* and *acceptance*. Those moments in my life when I realize that much of what goes on in the world is not up to me, not dependent upon me and not in the slightest bit, controlled by me. A key aspect of spirituality for me is not fooling myself into thinking I'm in control.

In a boat, in a human powered 22 inch wide, 16 feet long sea kayak, *water will out*. That is the water is boss. The flow, the power, the force, the direction, I do well to make use of it and to study it, respect it and have an idea of where it is flowing, how fast it is going and what's causing it to move, but in the end, I cannot control it. Much of life is like that. Regardless of our station in the world, the money we have, and the education we have attained we are ultimately not in control of our destinies. So too in a sea kayak.

If a tidal stream around the Isle of Skye on the West Coast of Scotland is moving at 7 knots and I can only paddle 3 to 4 knots, then I do best, not trying to fight it, but rather to work with it and altar my course or design my crossings and my trips to work with the power of water rather than against.

Finding God, encountering God in the ordinary for me, often consists of those three parts: Awe—the ability to be completely aware of the amazing world in which we live, to see and to know and to even immerse myself in my surroundings, reveling perhaps in the trail of gold the setting sun leaves on the sea. Agency—continually discovering, honing, honoring and developing the gifts God has given me to make a difference. To perhaps move my sea kayak gracefully though a tempestuous sea, or to make our way through the daily vagaries of the comings and goings of our lives, making good and gracious use of all the gifts, skills, talents and resources God had given us. And lastly Acceptance. Acceptance of that which

we cannot change or alter. To know how and where the water is moving and to use the force rather than to fight the flow.

Awe, Agency, and Acceptance: Three ways to see God acting in our world. Ordinary ways to be open to encountering God's extraordinary presence in our lives.

Amen.