June 6, 2021
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

Where do you see God? How do you experience God? That was the question that was asked years ago at the Kalamazoo Area Clergy Colloquium. That was a group of Presbyterian clergy from the area who used to gather to discuss topics from the theological to the personal. And one day one of the pastors asked, "How is it, or where is it that we most closely experience the presence of God?" And the answers were interesting. Some said that they experienced God in Nature, others when reading the Bible, still others said they most closely felt God's presence when they were in meditation or prayer. One said that it was in reading great theologians. That one I don't get. But what about you? Where is it that you most closely feel God, when is it that you know the presence of God?

Bede Griffiths is a Benedictine monk who has traveled the world and has asked people of various faiths, "Where is God?" He has found it interesting that when he asks people in the East, mostly Hindus and Buddhists will typically point to their heart, while Christians, Jews and Muslims typically point outside of themselves to the heavens. *(Bede Griffiths: Essential Writings. 2004)* Where is our point of contact with God? Is it out there? Is it in here? Where would you point to?

In the reading today from Samuel, I think the people wouldn't know where to point. They had stopped looking for God and instead were looking at themselves and at the nations around them. And they began to covet, and to be prideful, and to want to be successful and powerful, like the other nations, to be like everyone else. And where was God in all this? If God was guiding them, if they were God's people, why doesn't he make himself obvious to them?

Maybe you have a hard time finding God either place, either inside or outside, and you most often wonder where God is, or if there even is a God. Is that you sometimes? Probably that's all of us at times. Things happen to us in our lives and we just don't understand why, we just wonder if there is purpose in all of this. If God is there, why doesn't he make himself more obvious to us?

There is an old story about a disciple and his teacher. "Where shall I find God?" the disciple asked?

"Here," the teacher said.

"Then why can't I see God?" said the disciple.

"Because you do not look."

"But what should I look for?" the disciple asked.

"Nothing, just look," was the teacher's response.

"But at what?"

"Anything your eyes alight upon."

"But must I look in a special kind of way?" the disciple wanted to know.

"No, the ordinary way will do."

"But don't I always look the ordinary way?"

"No, you don't," the teacher said.

"But why ever not?" the disciple pressed.

"Because to look, you must be here. You're mostly somewhere else." (*Feasting on the Word, Year B, vol 3, p. 115.)*

That's my problem too. I think I'm mostly somewhere else. We're here in our sanctuary for the first time in a while, but am I here? I find my mind wandering other places. I wonder what other churches are doing? This has been a problem for me for the last 16 months. When we were worshiping only online, was God with us? The sanctuary was empty for all that time, where was God? Should we have been pushing to get our sanctuary back open? Other churches were. Do we want to be like them? What are they doing now? Do they have to make reservations and require masks? I wonder if we are getting as many people as they do. Are they doing Facebook or Youtube and which is better? Why can we be like them? So if God were here, I wouldn't see him because I am often not. A few years ago I asked the confirmation class to draw a picture of where God was for them or write it down in words. And one of the wiser people in the class, not me, said, "It is when I am still. When I can be present in a situation, I discover that God s there."

Wherever we are, God is. But most of the time our eyes are somewhere else. The people of Israel had their eyes on something other than where they were. They kept wanting something else. And they kept missing God, because God was right there with them. This summer we're going to be reading from the Hebrew Scriptures about the career of King David and how God uses a king to guide his people. And we may even see how God can use us in new ways. But we have to be here and our eyes have to be on God.

Where is God? Is God out there somewhere? Is he in here? Which way would you point? Let me suggest that there is another way to point. This way (stretch arms out). God is out there and in here and in each of us. Maybe one of the ways we most experience God is when the divine image in each of us comes in contact with the divine in someone else