

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Can't go anywhere where God is not

- Pastor Hank French

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:21-24).

Jesus had been traveling through Samaria where he met a Samaritan woman by a well and asked her for a drink of water. That was quite surprising, but it tells you a lot about Jesus. You see, Jews despised Samaritans and Samaritans didn't think very highly of Jews either, and Jesus was a Jew.

The Samaritans in Jesus' time were descendants of Jews who had intermarried with the Assyrians who had conquered Israel in 721 B.C.E. To the Jewish mind, intermarriage with non-Jews made the Samaritans "unclean" and thus to be shunned. Jesus shunned no one. He saw value in everyone, especially in the marginalized, and it never would have occurred to him not to speak with the woman at the well.

Samaritans worshiped God on a mountain in Samaria. Jews worshiped God in the temple in Jerusalem and they both thought they were right while the other was wrong. Jesus said they were both wrong. God cannot be contained either on a mountain or in a temple because God is Spirit and can be worshiped anywhere.

Temples and mountain altars are not needed; priests and rabbis are not needed; religious rites and rituals are not needed. All that is needed is to be someone who seeks the truth about God and whose own spirit connects with the Spirit of God. That can happen anywhere—in a church, in a forest, in the backyard, in the workplace or classroom or shopping mall, with others or alone.

In keeping with our focus on Maya Angelou this week, let me quote her again. She clearly gets it: "I believe that Spirit is one and is everywhere present. That it never leaves me. That in my ignorance I may withdraw from it, but I can realize its presence the instant I return to my senses.

"It is this belief in a power larger than myself and other than myself which allows me to venture into the unknown and even the unknowable. I cannot separate what I conceive as Spirit from my concept of God. Thus, I believe that God is Spirit."

As the ancient Hebrew poet put it:

*Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?...
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast (Psalm 139:7-10).*

God is Spirit, everywhere present, always wanting and waiting for our spirits to connect with God.

Prayer: Spirit God, open me and keep me open to your everywhere presence. Amen.