

Looking Up From Below (From a Sermon)

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain."

I've been to that mountain -- Mount Sinai in Egypt. It was an experience I looked forward to from the moment I heard that I would get to go there and be there in the Presence of God before that sacred mountain. Not that I didn't believe that I was ALWAYS surrounded by God's Presence. It's one of my favorite topics -- one of the foundations of my personal faith -- that God is always present among us and that realizing this can change how we see the world.

But this was special ... this mountain experience I was to have. I found photos of Mt Sinai and even used one as my wallpaper -- for my computer screen, that is. I was awed by that photo -- even though no one can really say for sure that this was THE mountain. But it has for a long time been considered as such.

I had been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to go on a sabbatical -- not because I could afford it -- but because I **couldn't**. So because I fit the grant guidelines in serving my Alaskan village church, as a pastor in my presbytery not making enough to **do** this thing -- I got to **do** it. (I love how God works!) And I decided on the trip of a lifetime -- an experience in the Holy Land.

And for just a couple hundred dollars more, there was the choice of a side trip to Egypt -- the Pyramids, the ancient temples, the Egyptian Museum -- where I got to see the well-preserved mummies of ancient Pharaohs, including Ramses II, possible Pharaoh of the Exodus --to whom I actually said, "Let my people go!"

Yes, it was wonderful being able to, as they say, run where Jesus walked in the Holy Land -- as we were always in a hurry. But that mountain in Egypt ... I wanted to be at that mountain, where the Presence of God was experienced in such a dramatic way by Moses and the Children of Israel -- the cloud hovering over its peak and the voice of God thundering from it.

I wanted to climb to the top!! And somehow maybe even hear that voice of God in some mystical way up there. But our bus was running late. Time was of the essence. And it was just wishful thinking, after all, that I could have ever actually hiked to the top like Moses had. But I stood before that mountain as others visited the famous monastery nestled beneath it. And I climbed around near the bottom and took home a piece of that mountain in precious rocks.

Yes, it's understandable that the ancients looked up and believed that the gods lived up above and that if you wanted to meet God you had to climb a mountain. Particular mountains are still sacred to people and cultures today and our biblical stories and the psalms associate them with God's Presence.

But we don't really need to climb a mountain to recognize and experience that Presence. In fact, I thought that this sermon was going to be about a spiritual mountaintop experience and having to come down eventually and face the world below. But God must have had another idea, because it soon occurred to me that I have experienced God more by looking UP from BELOW, as I walk this earth, knowing that there is a loftier perspective than what I often see before me.

So perhaps it was best that at Mount Sinai, I had to look up, not down.