

God sightings

By [Diane Roth](#)

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We recently added a new element to our weekly order of service. God-sightings, it is called. Instead of bird-watching, keeping an eye out for cardinals, or sparrows, or even the occasional catbird, we are to keep our eyes open for God, lurking about in our lives and neighborhoods.

We introduced God-sightings after our high school students returned from their annual mission trip. We asked two of the young people to share a bit of their experiences, and called them God-sightings. Easy-peasy.

The next week, after the message and after the scripture reading, we asked again. We began by affirming that God is with us through every aspect of our lives. God is in the world. God is very near, we reminded people. Then we asked the question, "Where have you seen God lately?"

There was an awkward silence. I felt a little disappointed. Hadn't anyone seen God in the last week? God really is all around us.

I realized later that it perhaps was not a fair experiment. We don't have a lot of practice in my faith tradition talking about where we have seen God. Even I didn't realize until an hour after the service that I could have testified that I saw God at two weddings the previous weekend. Four people were brave and foolish enough to pledge lifelong faithfulness to one another, holding hands out on a hot and humid Saturday afternoon. I saw God in those four hands, and heard God's voice in those promises. But it took awhile to remember, even for me.

I also realized a deep truth from my own faith tradition: yes, God is everywhere, God is very near, but God is also hidden. Sometimes God is very hidden, especially in the dark tragedies of so many current events these days, in the personal griefs and fears of our lives. Why should I be surprised when it is not automatically easy to testify about where you have seen God hiding during the past week? God is everywhere, but not obvious. Seeing takes practice. Speaking about what we have seen also takes practice.

With these realizations in mind, here are a few practices that might help us to see God:

1. Begin with prayer. It is as simple as the request of blind Bartimaeus, outside Jericho. What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asks him. "My teacher, let me see again," he replies. That's all. Just "My teacher, let me see again." And then, let Jesus teach us.
2. Go small. Go for the fleeting glimpses, for the whispers, not the shouts. If God is present (as we say) in water, bread, and wine, God is present in other small, and ordinary things. And people. The cardinal may only be in your front yard for a moment, not long enough to take a picture—and yet, yes, in the cardinal I recognize something. A tongue of flame, perhaps? A moment of glory.

I love the beginning of Luke, chapter 3. While Luke sets the scene and the timing by telling us all about who was emperor of Rome, and who was governor, and who was ruler in Judea, he goes on to say that the word of the Lord came to "John, in the wilderness." Rather than in the seats of power, where everyone expected the action to be, the people saw God out in the wilderness, standing in the river Jordan.

3. Look not for individuals, but relationships. Pay attention to service, acts of mercy, small sacrifices, what we do for love. Imagine what "grace" would look like, if grace were a painting, or a sculpture, or a movie.

Once, long ago, I was at an outdoor concert. I saw a couple not far from me, a man in a wheelchair, along with his wife. At the start of one of a song, I noticed from the corner of my eye that she began to dance with him, moving the wheelchair gracefully. They turned in circles together, moving to the music, pirouetting back and forth. I saw God then. I saw God in the dance.

4. Pay attention not just to success, but to failure. Pay attention to what is broken. Pay attention to the broken pieces, the shards, the tears, and to joy. Pay attention to what, and who, needs healing. Pay attention to what is bent over.

I see God every week in a man from my congregation. He walks bent over. I know the reason why. I knew his wife, who had contracted polio as a young

mother. She recovered, but later on contracted post-polio syndrome. Every week they came to church together, and he had to help her, to carry her. They also often went out to concerts and theatre. For many years he lifted her and carried her. Now he walks bent over. And I see God.

Where have you seen God this week?

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