

Finding God in a Tangled World

October 9, 2011

Genesis 11:1-9

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Most people like surprises. Do you? Well, Friday I had a great surprise. The phone rang – it was an ‘831’ area code and I wasn’t going to answer the call. You know, those ‘800’ numbers. But there was something vaguely familiar about the number so I answered anyway. Surprise! It was a close friend here from the Santa Cruz area wanting to stop by and visit with Norm and me. When he and his wife whom I had not yet met arrived it was like a party! They were hungry so we whipped up a lunch and all sat around the table catching up, getting to know his wife, telling stories and just having a great time amidst lots of laughter. What a great surprise!

Can you imagine God’s surprise when he saw this speck of dust and upon closer examination He saw what they Babylonians were doing? Wow, he must have thought, ‘They don’t get the message that the whole earth is theirs to enjoy and cherish. How did they get so tangled in their thinking? Where are their heads? Do they really think they can live without me at their side?’

Let’s explore ‘tangled.’ From the dictionary tangled is a noun that has three definitions: (1) a twisted mess; (2) a complicated or confused state or condition; or (3) a state of perplexity or complete bewilderment. I find all of these in the Tower of Babel story as well as our world today.

In the familiar Tower of Babel story we saw human alienation from God. We saw arrogance as the Babylonians sought to build the highest tower, the highest city, right up to the heavens. Then, they wanted to make a name for themselves. By reaching the heavens, there would be no need for God. Pride is demonstrated as the people were using the strongest building materials to ensure that their tower would last and withstand the elements. The Babylonians are being presumptuous and arrogant believing they really can reach the heavens. The tower has become an idol – a false God.

God reacted with purpose. As the story tells us the language was confused and the people scattered. God reacted to their assumed self-sufficiency.

The trouble with the tower of Babel was not that it was too close to God but that it was too far removed from earth. You may see God’s actions as punishment; I tend to see it as an act of loving-kindness. God was returning the people to the earth where as a people they would once again be grounded to the earth. Do you remember the second creation story, the earthly story of Adam and Eve? Perhaps the Tower of Babel is the culmination of the stories found in Genesis as it has brought us full circle to being grounded with earth again.

The Babylonians would no longer have a false sense of security that they could know and act independent of God. They now had to relearn how to know God since their plans had crumbled. The people were a tangled mess. They were dispersed and couldn't communicate. The people were questioning themselves -- how do we get to know God? The Babylonians had by themselves created a tangled world.

I think you might enjoy a modern day version of this parable:

Once upon a time people decided to build a tower reaching to heaven. They were all of one mind. "We will show God what we can do. We will have the tallest tower in the world."

I love the people with the smallest tower in the world, too," God said, and he confused their language.

My husband and I are enmeshed in the connected world more than we imagined when we moved from Silicon Valley to Santa Rosa 9 years ago. We were looking to simplify our lifestyle, and disconnect from all electronic gadgets that we were tethered to. What a surprise it was to realize that it is a digital world no matter where you live. Whether you are retired or still working, most of the gadgets are essential for every day living. We can't leave the house without cell phones, BlackBerrys, and Kindles – wow! If we are not careful, it is so easy to get caught up in it all and miss the beauty of our surroundings and most important time for prayer, connecting us to the important things in life.

I am reminded of a quote; unfortunately it is from an anonymous source:

The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power to tell just when the hands will stop, at late or early hour. Now is the only time you own. Live, love, toil with a will. Place no faith in time. For the clock may soon be still.

We saw a sad example of this in the news last week as we learned of the premature death of Steve Jobs, the technological giant of Apple Computer. He was only 56 years old - my age! Now that is a sobering thought and reminder to live each day with meaning; meaning that cannot be found without God at my side.

In Steve Jobs' commencement speech at Stanford a few years ago, he said:

...Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.

When Steve said these words, he was not speaking of knowing God's will or following your heart. But they are so à propos. We can easily read into his words knowing our loving God.

We also heard some very good news last week as two Liberian and one Arab woman were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

What the news of last week says to me is to get out of my own way and become grounded in the spirit of God.

I have a favorite hymn, but it is not one in our hymnals. It is called 'Ere You Left Your Room This Morning.'

I'd like you to hear the first verse. First we'll listen to the beautiful melody played by Lora McAfee.

Ere you left your room this morning,
Did you think to pray?
In the name of Christ our Savior,
Did you sue for loving favor,
As a shield today?

O how praying rests the weary!
Prayer will change the night to day;
So when life seems dark and dreary,
Don't forget to pray.

I love those words. Oh, how such a small change in my morning routine would prepare me for the day and put me in the right attitude of heart. The hymn reminds us to start our day with prayer – communicating with God. In this hymn we are being asked to talk to and listen to God. I've tried this morning routine for the past couple of weeks. What a difference it makes! God is with me ALL day. My gadgets are less important. Taking the time to pray and talk with God about those things that concern me or should bring joy to my day brings about an inner peace. By starting my day with God, I can turn to Him all day to share my joys, help me through temptation, keep anger in check by helping me to find grace and forgiveness...and the myriad of other things that we face each day. God is with me at all times. I can't help being reminded of another hymn we sing that says 'And he walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own; and the joy that we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.'

Our world is very tangled and confusing. Many of us are very tangled with technology. Sometimes we are bewildered by the world around us. Where is God in each of our lives? We need to consider unplugging ourselves, getting grounded and letting God into our personal world. If we start each day with God, the day may be less complicated and tangled. There may be less distractions – unplug and get grounded with God! Let God in before you start your day. Leave room in your heart to hear God and radiate His love to the world.

Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray? Did you invite God into your life? This daily spiritual discipline has made my life more God-driven.

Amen