

EXPERIENCING GOD
August 5, 2012 –John 21: 24-25 –Communion Sunday
The Church of the Covenant

I remember “experiencing God” once on a white water rafting trip at Ohio Pyle here in Western, PA. I was in a raft with three women from a former church young adult group from a former church of mine. We were, unfortunately, raft number 13, and when the poor person who was the guide for our trip down the rapids gave instructions whatever he said NOT to do, we did. Don’t go right; we went right. Don’t go too quickly; we went too quickly. We got to a dangerous stretch of the rapids; which were referred to as Pinball and Dimple rocks. If you landed on Pinball it would bounce you right into Dimple rocks where you would be stuck and worse yet, your raft might dump you out and all four would be swimming out in the rapids. So our guide dismissed the first raft and it bounced into Pinball Rock and then dumped everyone out at Dimple. Next. Same thing happened; the raft bounced into Pinball and directly into Dimple, depositing the contents of the raft in the rapidly moving river. He finally got to us; gave the instruction one more time; and just sort of sadly shook his head and we moved inexorably to our sad fate. We managed to do everyone one better; we got turned around in the rapids. They take a candid picture of you in the rapids and have it for sale and I duly noted that our shot, correctly enough, depicted us going down the rapids backward! Go raft 13! So we as predicted bounced into Pinball Rock whereupon it shot us directly onto Dimple Rock but this time, this time, we did something no one else did. We got stuck on the rock! One of the Reed sisters went catapulting into the sky and was last seen bobbing up and down in the torrent. The other Reed sister was screaming at the top of her lungs. The third young woman was holding onto Pastor Broberg for dear life; my legs were out in the river; my body stuck in the raft. You lose all strength in about 30 seconds because of the force of the river so I was like a wet wash rag. The weight of my body was holding us onto the rocks. And I cried out, sort of like a bad scene from Titanic, “Just let me go-ooooooooooooo!” Whereupon she did. And now my entire body was UNDER the raft as it went down the rapids, bouncing my fat head on the rocks. Explains a lot. But in that moment as I was under the raft and gulping cold water and unable to breathe, head bashed on the rocks, I believe I experienced God. He said to me –“Stu, Stu, never go white water rafting ever again”. When God speaks, who am I to disagree??????

Which is just to say that there are numerous ways in which we can experience God. It is amazing how when gasping for breath God gets our attention. It is amazing how during tough times in life God also gets our attention. We can experience God in prayer, in worship, in a small group. We can experience God in our life, in our church, in a conversation with a friend. We can experience God as we sing a hymn, or sing a praise chorus, or watch a baby being baptized, or share in the sacrament of Holy Communion. There’s not just one way to experience God; there are many ways. To be sure, as Christians, we believe that those ways are all pointed to the One who IS “the Way” as the Bible describes Him; Jesus IS “*the way and the truth and the life*” (John 14: 7) and it is through HIM that we may experience His Father. We come to the Father through the Son. We experience the presence of God through His Holy Spirit through the mediator of the Holy Spirit, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There is no “spiritual experience” apart from Jesus. But it would be wrong to suggest, say, that there is only one style of worship where we may experience God; that there is only one place where we may experience God; that we can only experience God through a small group and not through a Bible Study, or through an adult ed class but not in a prayer group. That we can experience Him at 9:43 or at 11:00 a.m. but not at 8:30 a.m. One of the most important things about experiencing God is that it is GOD who chooses where and how and in what way we experience Him. God shows up and then we can experience Him; but it is not the form of the way we are trying to experience Him or our plans to try to experience Him that allow us to experience Him. No, God is Sovereign; God chooses; God decides how

and where He will be experienced. Funny thing about God; He's always God. Funny thing about us; we're always NOT God.

The sacrament of Holy Communion is one of the primary ways to experience God. Why is that? Because it was instituted by Jesus. Jesus told us to do it and that when we do it indeed He will be present as two or more are gathered in His name. *"Do this in remembrance of me"*, says Jesus. That's why we do it and that's why there is a very high likelihood that unless today you are completely shut down spiritually you are quite likely to experience God, personally and directly, today.

Here's another thing about experiencing God. When we do experience God in Spirit and in Truth; when we do experience Him in all His fullness; when the God of the universe comes in all His gentle power and strong love...O, then it is we want MORE of Him. As human beings we were designed by our Creator not to be satisfied with just a bit of God. No, to experience Him partially makes us want to experience Him completely. We hunger and thirst after MORE God when we truly experience His presence in our lives. That's part of how we know we have actually experienced HIM; we want more of Him and are somehow not satisfied until we do.

Here's the last thing about experiencing God. He's not done pouring out His presence to His people. We read in scripture about the mighty acts of God; people's lives touched and changed; people restored from grief; people healed from infirmity; people coming to faith in Jesus Christ and having their lives be so profoundly moved by the love and power of Jesus that they are never the same again. People praying and those prayers being answered. People reaching out to a broken world and that world being put back together in Jesus' name. If we were to take the time just to ask you all to share what God has done for you this past week we would be here until Monday morning recounting the stories and the blessings and the ways God has intervened in our lives. Story after story; recounted testimony after never-ending testimony. God at work in His world. God at work in and through His people. God ready, willing and able to intervene in your life and in my life today...right here...right through this sacrament...right now...

That's why our scripture for today says: *"But there were also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."* (John 21: 25) God did not stop working 2,000 years ago. Jesus did not complete all that He intends to do 2,000 years ago. No. Our Lord is still writing books, still pouring out His presence, still writing the story of the love of God poured out through His people, poured out into a world that needs a Savior, poured out through times like this sacrament. What thing do you need, O Christian? How do you need today, O seeker, to experience God? What on-going story does God want to write in the book of your life today? All the world itself cannot contain what the Lord Jesus will write in our hearts today. Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*