

If you want to find out what kind of shape you are in - go to the high altitude places - like Denver, Colorado! I have just returned from the *Festival of Homiletics* which was held in Denver. The lectures/preaching/worship took place in three different churches - within easy walking distance from the hotels. Two of the churches however, were 'up the hill' - which felt like 'up the mountain.' I kept forgetting about the warnings of high altitude and would charge out the door of the hotel - heading up to the church at a fast clip -so as to get a good seat (is there ever a good seat in a church that is over 100 years old?) and would find myself gasping for air while my heart was beating wildly in my chest. Then I would remember - oh yeah - altitude does figure in here (even though it is possible that I am actually out of shape). To get energized - maybe it is necessary to come back down - come off the mountain - and enter into the life of the city. Easy to do in a place like Denver which has a long street marked as a 'mall' with a rail car that travels, free, up and down the street, which is loaded with stores, outdoor restaurants, outdoor seating areas - all teeming with life.

This seemed to be a recurring theme in the comments offered by the variety of theologians and preachers during the week: God is not on the mountain - God is down in the cities - among the people. The God of pathos is with us all the time, in everything, not sitting on a divine throne, floating above us, but with US - us being all of humanity. Or as one speaker put it, "God is around the planet vivifying - animating the spirit of the world."

We 'the CHURCH' have been resting on mountain tops - expecting everyone to make the trek up to 'us' - where we have been dwelling in what we perceived to be as a 'place of privilege.' We created a beautiful but sometimes dense language about US and a way of operating that, while we would say is inviting, is really about US. Or as one speaker put it, "We turned Jesus's words, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' into 'We are the way, we are the truth, we are the life' - no one comes to God without coming through US."

If Jesus is the way of Love - if the Torah means finding the way - then perhaps our intention should focus on how WE can be re-interpreted as the WHOLE human family - working together for the good of all. Because that is where God is: Dwelling among humanity - living and suffering with humanity. God is amidst what God has created - in all the beauty of the day and in the mystery of the evening - and we the CHURCH - who so often lose people through our great doctrinal language - need to get ourselves off the mountain and into the lives of humanity and to pay attention to the life of creation.

The PEW research numbers were released this week which show that Christianity has pretty much taken a huge nose-dive in numbers. So the first thought might be- how can we increase our numbers? How can we make more Christians? What do we need to do to bring people to our way? But I think the issue is a much larger one of how can we of many denominations and faiths work together to save this fragile, and hurting world where we share life together?

One of the speakers put it in a very blunt way: "Churches are isolated gene pools with denominational silos." He went on to say that for the most part, "Churches, rather than wanting to be 'pregnant' with the joy of working with others, building alliances, would rather be in hospice care- maintaining the status quo until death. Most of us would say, "Our tradition is beautiful." But perhaps 'our' tradition or 'your' tradition, beautiful as they may be - are not

enough. Perhaps the real energy - vitality - real life - will happen at the intersections of the CHURCH and the WORLD - which would mean other traditions outside our own comfort zone. We do not own God. We do not own Jesus.

The 'other' does not need to look like me, think like me, or be like me. Each person created is a sacred representative of the Divine Life-Giver. How can I, how can you, how can the CHURCH, practice looking beyond our short-sighted boundaries in order to connect with the rest of humanity - in order that we might survive? Or do we just maintain until Christianity or the church falls away and then we start over?

Personally, I want to be a part of salvation - salve - healing - while I'm still alive.