

Where to Worship?

The woman at the well famously discussed with Jesus where was the right place to worship (John 4:19-24). Which mountain was the right one, the Temple Mount of Moriah in Jerusalem according to Judaism or Mount Gerizim according to Samaritanism? In this time with the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic when church services have been put on hold, where should we go to worship?

I know from my own experience that I feel closest to God when I am in my garden or out running or walking across the fields near my home. I can praise, pray, grieve and argue with Jesus as I feel the wind on my face and mud beneath my feet.

Connecting with God and being inspired to praise Him can be much easier in nature. Many people of no or little faith will talk of the awe and wonder of a sunset, a forest glade or the intricacy of a flower or beetle. Indeed the whole of the cosmos has been made *by* and *for* Jesus (Colossians 1:16).

So it should not surprise us to find ourselves drawn into worship when we are in nature. Indeed all of the rest of the created order is praising God all of the time, not by choice as we do, but because it has been created to do so. The birds sing God's praises, the trees lift their branches in adoration and the flowers lift their heads in love.

In this time of self-isolation, when we need to keep our physical distance to keep ourselves and others safe, we still can join with the whole communion of creation in worship. For some this may mean looking out the window or taking some time in the garden, for others, this could be going for a walk or getting to the park.

But what next? How can we turn a walk in the park into a journey of worship?

1. **Join in.** Take time to notice nature. See how it is revering Jesus, its maker. Join in with your own praise and adoration, either silently or out loud (with physical distancing, this may be less embarrassing!). You can use the words of the Psalmists, hymns, liturgy or your own words as the Holy Spirit prompts you.
2. **Give thanks.** Find 5 or 10 things that you can show gratitude to Jesus for in your surroundings. Remember that we are all completely depended on our relationship with creation for our everyday needs: air, water, food, mental health etc. And therefore, dependent upon our creator God.
3. **Intercede.** Surrounded by the beauty and creativity of nature, the shortcomings of humanity are often clearer, but so also is the power and timelessness of God. Bring before Him your own concerns and the needs of the natural world, suffering from our misuse and abuse.
4. **Be tactile.** When we are having to be careful about our person to person contact, taking time to touch and connect with other parts of God's creation can be enriching. Feel a sticky bud of a horse chestnut tree, smell a bluebell, let a woodlouse walk across your hand. (Be mindful of not touching surfaces than others may have touched). Rowan Williams once wrote, "Receive the word of God. Go for a walk. Get wet. Dig the earth."
5. **Let the joy flow.** God's character is displayed in nature: good, creative, generous, humorous and fun. Allow yourself to be playful in nature. Use a spotter's guide, challenge a friend to a bird watching competition, play Pooh sticks, run and skip!

You may find it helpful to use outdoor prayer resources, such as those from the Sanctuary Centre www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/prayer-stations-god-revealed-in-creation.pdf

Paul saw how Jesus has revealed himself as creator and redeemer, writing in Romans 1:20 “For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.”

Our church doors may be closed, but God’s sacred house is the whole of His creation and we can all find Him there.

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