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Have you ever had one of those holy moments when you sensed God's presence in an overwhelming way? You somehow knew that God was in the midst of that moment, in that life event. Although we know God is with us always, there are those times in life when God's presence becomes more real. More intense. More meaningful.

The early church saw these moments as mysterious and sacred, using the word *sacrament* to describe special events in our lives, a word that comes from the Latin word *sacrāmentum*, meaning sacred or holy. These holy moments occur at certain times of life, such as birth or marriage or the ordination into the ministry. Crisis points in life such as illness or when one messes up and confesses one's sins also create an opportunity for a sacred moment of healing and forgiveness.

Although our early Disciples leaders did not place as much emphasis on these particular events as sacraments, they agreed with two sacred moments in the life of the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Early Disciples leader Alexander

Campbell preferred the term *ordinance* rather than *sacrament*, but regardless of what they're called, baptism and communion are very sacred and holy moments.

Last week we began thinking about baptism, and next week we will reflect about communion. But first let's pause again and think about baptism. How many of you can recall your baptism or the stories that a parent told you about that event? Do you recall it as a sacred moment, as something special that sticks out in your mind?

I think fifth grader Michael will always remember his baptism. He was large for his age and often got into fights at school, but he asked me if he could be part of my Pastor's Class and prepare for baptism. He struggled to learn in school and often had conflicts with his teachers, which resulted in him being expelled for weeks at a time.

Amazingly Michael was very focused in our times together, completing his homework, being polite to me and the other class members. I felt that he was taking his preparation for baptism more

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seriously than other children in the class, for I sensed his reflection meant something deeper to him.

A week after his baptism, I asked Michael what his experience meant to him, and he replied, “I mess up a lot, and when you dunked me in the water it felt like I was being washed and cleaned. I get to start over.”

In the midst of the struggles he faced in life, our class was a safe place for him to admit his struggles and receive God’s forgiveness. It was a sacred moment, a place he sensed that God was part of his life, that God was dwelling with him.

In addition to sacred moments of time, we may find sacred places where we find calmness and peace, a space where God whispers in our ears as we quietly meditate about our lives. I often find that place of solace sitting along the pond, feeding the ducks and swans in our backyard. As I watch them interact with one another, I marvel at their social interactions, how they care for their young and protect them. I’m amazed at how I have formed

friendships with some of the ducks, who wander to our patio door and tap on the glass when they’re ready to eat, who have formed enough trust with me to eat out of my hand. In this holy place, I have sensed God’s presence, not just with me, but with all of creation.

I think that may have been what the psalmist had in mind when writing about God’s lovely dwelling place, for the writer longed to be in God’s courtyard, a place where even the sparrows find a home and place to raise their young. I like how *The Message Bible* phrases Psalm 84:

Birds find nooks and crannies in your house,
sparrows and swallows make nests there.
They lay their eggs and raise their young,
singing their songs in the place where we
worship.

This translation calls this a beautiful place, while others translate the word as a dwelling place. The Hebrew root word is שׁוּב [shaw·kan], which can mean dwell, abide, inhabit, and can sometimes even mean “neighbor.”

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In other words, this is a place where God lives and hangs out with neighbors, a place where everyone is welcome, even the birds and creatures have a place to dwell with God.

The *Message Bible* then offers a beautiful translation of verses 5-7:

And how blessed all those in whom you live,
whose lives become roads you travel;
They wind through lonesome valleys, come
upon brooks,
discover cool springs and pools brimming with
rain!

The imagery shifts from the temple as God's dwelling place to our lives as God's dwelling place, full of twisting roads and lonesome valleys where we encounter obstacles, struggles, temptations; places where we get lost and sidetracked.

While thinking this week about this imagery of being God's dwelling place, about the twisting roads where one can get lost, the news reports reminded me of how some got very lost over this past week. Drivers in Charlottesville, VA and Barcelona and Cambrils Spain were very lost as they drove their cars into crowds of people, killing and

wounding many innocent people. In our nation, the issue is more than having a statue of a Civil War leader taken down, for the intent seems to swirl around who is welcome or not welcome in our nation. Some want to suggest that one's religion or the color of one's skin can determine who is welcome in America. Our country was founded on the idea that this dwelling place is open to everyone, but some want to exclude certain people from this freedom that we cherish.

In Spain, terrorists used a distorted view of religion to justify spreading fear and terror.

What happened in Spain is not what Islam teaches, just as what happened in Virginia is not what Christianity teaches. Some take their faith and distort it into twisted ideas for their own power and purpose. They corrupt our dwelling places of welcome into exclusive places filled with hatred and fear.

Michele Hill, a psychiatrist from Ireland, tells of her experience of terror while visiting in Barcelona this week:

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We were wandering slowly with the crowds when we heard the shots. Two loud claps, and then chaos. My husband shouted “run!” and we started to move.

It was over in seconds. Surprisingly for me, I learned that there is enough time in such moments to register that something is very serious. I knew they were terrorists. The crowds split, with people running to the sides at lightning speeds....

I turned to my right, saw my husband’s expression of horror first, and then the van. It was at most 10ft away and coming right at us...

I close my eyes. We are not hit. My husband said it mounted the pavement on two wheels and just missed us....

We crouched for a few seconds behind the stand, realised we were unharmed and checked on a nearby injured man. We did not hang around. We had no idea what else might happen.

As the writer waited in the airport to fly home, she reflected:

I vow to hug my family tightly and tell them how much I love them. When I pray or meditate,

which I need to do more often, I will now be thankful for my safety, in addition to my health and happiness.

We know we are lucky. We can move on. But what about the families in states riven by terrorism? This must be their daily struggle. I need to do more to help. We all do.¹

In the midst of her terror in the twisting turns of her life, she discovered what the psalmist called “cool springs and pools brimming with rain,” what we might call a rain of hope. For her, this rain of hope would come through hugs with her family and giving thanks more often.

This rain of hope also comes through our baptisms, for as we are submerged down into the water, we emerge with new life, with a fresh start, something that occurs day after day through the promise of Jesus Christ who came to dwell among us. In the midst of the chaos, along the winding roads you travel through lonesome valleys, know that you are not alone, for you are the dwelling place of God Most High.

¹ www.theguardian.com/profile/michelle-hill