

"Where is God Hiding?"
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First Church of East Hartford
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Please Note: These are notes to a lively sermon, hopefully more akin to poetry or spoken word than a lecture or academic paper. Physical movement and delivery cannot be captured on the page, but I hope this gives you a glimpse of what was shared in worship.

Bible Trivia: Why does Jesus tell the demons to be quiet? [write your answer down]

a. To avoid the crowds (vs. 44-45)

Indeed, the news of his healing brings on the crowds,
but his preaching brings crowds too,
so he doesn't seemd opposed to the crowds.

a = half right

b. "because they [the demons] know him"

Yes, as we know from earlier stories, the demons know him as the Son of God
and if the demons proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God,
Jesus may have worried that the demons would led people astray;
people may think Jesus will destroy satan through singular miraculous works,
but JC destroys satan through his death and resurrection.
instead of personally healing every person,
JC combats evil by bringing together a diverse community to love.

b = a possible correct answer

c. To avoid being minimized as a magician,

later, in chpt 3, the scribes put him down as a sort of dirty magician
But Jesus doesn't want to be limited to his work as a healer,
we know this because after his healing becomes well-known,
he goes out to pray and comes back to say,
"Let us go on to neighboring towns,
so that I may proclaim the message there also;
for that is what I came out to do."

he has come for an even bigger mission and doesn't want to be seen as just a magician
- he came to proclaim a radical message that the kingdom of heaven is near;
that God is with us -
that in Jesus Christ God is indeed with us.

c = another possible correct answer

PRAYER

In our story this morning the disciples go about searching for Jesus.
They look all around and he turns up in the most obvious of places: in prayer.
It reminds me a bit of the "hidden pictures" found in the *Highlights* magazines:

the magazine would have a complex picture and then a list of items (ex. tea cup, carrot)
then you would try to find the item in the picture,
usually they were carefully disguised (ex. carrot would look like a walking stick).
This morning I invite you to join in a spiritual "hidden pictures" exercise/game.

On your cover is a famous Japanese woodblock painting.

It was created around 1832 by a famous artist, Hokusai,
who had decided to paint pictures of everyday life and everyday people,
instead of the traditional pictures of royalty.

He created this picture during a time when he struggled with great poverty and illness.

This picture is the first in a series entitled, "36 Views of Mt. Fuji"

It is entitled, "The Great Wave (off Kanagawa)"

Where is God hiding in this picture of the wave? [ask for answers from congregation]

Mountain:

Mt. Fuji is and was a sacred pilgrimage site in Japan -

many mountains are sacred;

something about reaching up & connecting to creation beyond ourselves.

In this picture, the mountain may symbolize the peace that gets us through chaos

God is often found in the sturdy places that stand beside the chaos of a wave

(psalm 23, The Lord leads me beside still waters)

Even when the wave looks to be looming,

it will come down and the mountain will be there,

strong and powerfully present.

People in the boats:

praying for help in the midst of the wave;

as Jesus often prayed for help

(in this week's story & in the garden before his death)

Boats:

These are fast fishing boats,

bringing live fish back to shore to be sold.

The boats are a sturdy structure for the people inside,

but they also are the means to providing a stable livelihood.

God is found in the structures that hold us and keep us going.

In the midst of grief,

maintaining a routine or rhythm often helps us navigate the upheaval of loss

Wave:

It may look like a tsunami, but it is actually a relatively normal wave.

It is a wave the fishermen probably have dealt with before.

It may appear to be devastating,

but it turns out to be a challenge that the fishermen will likely survive.

God may be in the wave,

not as a force of destruction,

but as a force challenging us to hope and love deeper.

God is everywhere.

boats, mountain, people....

God is present in it all.

This reality addresses many of the questions posed last week:

What happens to a child if the parents disagree about God?

God is walking alongside the child, as the mountain stands beside the sea -
it may be more difficult for the child to see,
but that doesn't mean God isn't there.
it might also be that the child wrestles with his faith early on
and in doing so have the chance to grow in his faith from a young age.

Why does God (at times) step in and fix things at what seems to be the last minute?

If God is everywhere, continually present with us,
then God is continually working to fix things.
Sometimes it seems last minute because the wave looks so big at this particular moment
Yet, the wave can't stay that big forever,
eventually it will subside.
God is right there with us, riding the wave with us.

Our challenge is to see God in the hidden places.

Sometimes we need to turn the picture around or ask a friend for help,
Sometimes we need new glasses.
Sometimes we need to take a break and come back later.

Even though there might be obstacles in our way,

God is still there with us:
in the mountain, in the wave, in the boat, in the people beside us.

God is everywhere, continually present with us.

May we find God in some unexpected place this week. Amen.