

Practicing faith on vacation

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Whenever I go on vacation, I realize again how tangled up my faith practices are with my work. I am not proud to say it, and I begin each vacation time with a desire to encounter God on vacation in a different way than I do in my daily work. I bring along a Bible, and I look for devotional reading that does not have anything to do with having a more faithful, successful, growing, deeply authentic congregation. But I realize as well that I have a lot of those books. Where's one that is just about faith, my faith, and doesn't have anything to do with my vocation?

I finally found my copy of Debbie Blue's book *Consider the Birds* and began to read it, just a little, not as much as I had anticipated, but at least I got started.

One of the things I realize right away on vacation is how much of my Bible reading and study is directly related to preparing sermons, Bible studies, and confirmation. It makes me a little wistful for the days when I used to read large chunks of the Gospel of John in the evening and write in my journal about my insights. (Yeah, I really did that at one time.)

And then there is vacation prayer. As it turns out, vacation prayer is every bit as random and undisciplined as it is when I am working. Vacation is not necessarily a time to learn a new spiritual discipline, although I have tried bringing prayer beads, my "praying in color" utensils, and a small book to pray the Hours by (wait, what time is it?).

What is even harder, though, is to stop the incessant conversation in my head about my work: to go to a worship service without wondering if we could use that song in my congregation, to read a chapter of a book without thinking about whether there is a good sermon illustration in there, to practice praying with beads without wondering if we could hold a class on this subject at my church, to pray without thinking about all of the saints and sinners back home.

What I recognize, though, is that I really need God with me on vacation, but in a different way. I need to experience the God who does not require me to be wise or

witty or insightful, but who shows me grace, allows me grace, even when I forget to pray at the specified time, even when the Bible studies crash and burn, even when the sermon falls flat, or I sing off key. I need somehow to untangle so that faith is not just my work, but the air I breathe, the love I seek, not something for others, but for myself.

As it turns out, I don't think I can stop God from coming along, and even though my dreams are still of church services run amok, tasks uncompleted, there are still the birds to consider, the eagles that soar above the river, the sparrows everywhere. On vacation a few weeks ago, Instead of looking up Bible verses, we practiced looking for eagles. We drove along the river, and considered from where it flows, and where it will go. These are not bad spiritual disciplines for vacation, I decided.

Someday perhaps I will have it figured out. In the meantime, I will remember that my work and my faith are intertwined, tangled up, and I can't untangle them. I can't untangle them, but I can remember that they aren't the same thing, while I am driving along the river, looking for eagles, looking for sparrows, looking for grace.

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