

Spiritual Life.... On the Road with God

August 2014

I know we all know that God is with us wherever we go. It's pretty basic to our faith; plus it's the name of our congregation. Immanuel means "God with us". But as I've been traveling this year, and thinking about previous travels, I have been pondering how, exactly, we take God "with us".

Most days here in beautiful Eden Prairie, Minnesota, I'm pretty comfortable with my faith. I have a sense of who God is, what God is like and what God is up to, in my daily life. Those are the images I draw on when I pray and when I worship. They fit the time and place and circumstances in which I live.

Travel always challenges that sweet comfort. And that's good – we need challenges in our faith.

When I first traveled to Mexico City and to Lomas de San Isidro, it was jarring. I know that God isn't just my God, but God of all. But what was the God that I knew like to these people, whose circumstances were so different from mine. In what ways did they know the God I prayed to, trusted and worshipped? How might I have to think differently, in order to make my God a little (a lot) bigger?

On a tour of Italy this Spring, I was stunned by the majesty and beauty of the old cathedrals. Such grandeur! Such artistry! Decades and decades of back-breaking toil in their making. Unfortunately, they rose out of a kind of devotion that no longer exists in most of Europe. Those stunning monuments to God are, in fact, just monuments now – for tourists' viewing far more than worship. How did this happen? Where did the Church go wrong? And what does this mean for our context? And does the fact that few people worship at the cathedrals mean that Christianity is dead in Italy? I don't think so. But it's hard to know what God is up to there. How is God "with" God's people in Italy?

Of course, you don't have to stray very far from home to have faith questions rise. Maybe, like me, you have agnostic or non-Christian family members. How do you handle mealtime prayers when you are guests in their home? Personal devotions? What about Sunday worship? Do you go, if they don't? And how do you talk about your faith – the faith that defines you so strongly - in a way that encourages, but doesn't condemn? Where do you start, if you start at all?

I love my quiet little prayer corner at home and the God that meets me there. And I love the God we worship together here on Sunday mornings. But it's good for me to get away from both of them once in a while. When I do, God invariably becomes bigger and more mysterious. I face bigger questions and am forced to see in new ways. I am humbled – and my faith grows. And that's good. Having traveling with Immanuel – the God who is with all of us!

Pastor Susan