

“God Is Our Guide”
Psalm 48
August 12, 2012
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How do you explain God to your friends? If you believe in God, I wonder how you started to have faith and trust in God for the first time in your life. I believe that our experience is a very important way to encounter with God, but unfortunately, our personal experiences haven't been much valued as a way to explain our Christian faith in our human history.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is one of the great human thinkers in our world, as a 'bridge philosopher' between the Medieval times and humanism movement in the 18th century. He tried to free the human mind from the narrow minded Medieval Christianity. He emphasized that human beings have to use both their reason and their senses, especially to understand God. For example, Kant believed that our Christianity and understanding of God must be built not based on faith but on reason. He called it, "pure rational ideas". He argues, **“The wish to talk to God is absurd. We cannot talk to one we cannot comprehend — and we cannot comprehend God; we can only believe in Him.”**

Even though he believed in pure reason, he realized that there are two things that he still couldn't understand in his book, *Critique of Practical Reason*: **“Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.** (Two things fill the heart with renewed and increasing awe and reverence the more often and the more steadily that they are meditated on: the starry skies above me and the moral law inside me.)” As he tried to approach God from his reason, he acknowledged that he couldn't fully understand the mystery of God in his soul.

I believe that it is a blessing to have faith in God. Thomas Aquinas (1274), a great theologian gave us an insight about faith. He said, “For those with faith, no evidence is necessary; for those without it, no evidence will suffice.” God meets us unexpectedly and in surprising ways during our life journey. Our personal experience is another great way to experience the presence of God. Aquinas also said that wonder is the desire of knowledge. I don't mean to exclude the role of reason, church and the Bible in our Christian faith. Actually, these are very important things to experience and develop our discernment of God's revelation in our faith.

Let me briefly share a basic Methodist belief about experience of God in our faith: How do we experience (know) God? We, Methodists believe that God

reveals his presence through four channels: The Bible, Reason, Experience, and Tradition. Faith comes from God's grace, but our experience and reason are important channels to the grace of God.

Sometimes, I ask a question to myself, "how did I become a believer, Christian, and even became a minister?" I was a pretty 'reason' oriented person. I studied Metaphysics (Ethics) for my master's degree. When I was a college student, I was full of questions and doubts about the Bible, Christian attitude and understanding of God. But looking back on my life, I had never rejected my faith in God. Faith has always been an important part of my life. It may sound silly to you. Ironically, my faith in God was formed through summer camp experiences, not through Sunday school. (I don't mean that Sunday school is less important!!) I loved to go to church summer camp when I was a middle and high school student. I was so excited to get away from parents, made new friends, and had fun with new things like camp fires, singing new songs and sleeping in a tent. I still remember that I loved two things in my childhood: Boy Scout and church camp. Like Immanuel Kant, I still remember the starry skies that I experienced with wonder and awe in my heart at the camp site at night. During the summer camp (probably at the camp fire time), I accepted the possibility of God in my heart.

Our Hebrew Scripture reading illustrates the presence of God using the images of mountains. "¹Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain, ²beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion." My wife and I went to Yosemite National Park every year during summer. We temporarily stopped two years ago because of Jacob's arrival to us, but we have a plan to take him tent camping next year. Someone compared Yosemite to a "big cathedral". Nature is a great place to learn and experience about God. The Psalmist made a confession of faith in verse 9, "In this mountain, we ponder your steadfast love, O God. You are our God and our guide forever". In a different sense, mountain image may not be a 'safe place' from danger and attack. In the night, if we don't have a lantern at night time or a compass, we easily get lost and in trouble finding the right direction. In this understanding, our life is like a 'summer camping' experience in the mountains. We hope to find God's presence and protection. Our Scripture reading affirms that in a time of desperate need of God's presence. God is our guide for our safety like a lantern light in the night.

This year, our church sent four youth to the summer camp. I was pleased that they had a wonderful time there for a week. It will be a great memory to their life journey. We are very curious about what they experienced or learned from a week long camp.