

**God Moments**  
**Genesis 28 (Jacob's Ladder)**  
**July 13 2014**

Late Last Saturday night,  
218 teenagers and adults arrived back at this church  
after a week of fixing homes through the Appalachia Service Project --  
218 people piling out of buses, with weary bodies, but full hearts.

Full hearts from a spectacular week;  
you'll be hearing the stories for months to come, I promise you.  
Because as surely as you'll come home from Appalachia with an arm sore from  
swinging a hammer,  
just as surely you come home with stories.

Here's one of my ASP stories I love to tell --  
I won't say "stop me if you've heard this one,"  
because, hey, I'm in the pulpit, and you can't stop me.

This is a story from very early in my ASP experience.

It was late morning on a Tuesday, Tuesday of ASP week.  
And it was a beautiful day. The sun was shining but it wasn't too hot -- a little breeze  
was blowing - it was, in fact, a perfect ASP work day  
for me and my very enthusiastic work crew.

That is, it *would* have been the perfect work day.  
Except that I had made a rather crucial error that morning.  
I had forgotten this bucket of screws that we needed,  
kind of essential screws.  
We actually couldn't do the next step of our project without them.  
And so we were stuck.  
My whole crew couldn't do anything until someone from the ASP staff  
showed up in their pick-up truck with, hopefully, my bucket of screws.

I was really mad at myself.

Chagrined, embarrassed, and just miserably mad at myself.

Kids prepare all year to get to go to APpalachia, and there they were, all rared up to work and they couldn't.

So I told them to go sit in the shade and relax, the last thing they wanted to do, and I went and sat by myself so that I could feel miserable all alone.

And that's where the nun found me.

That's right, the nun. Well, I didn't actually know it was a nun.

I was sitting on the hillside moping, and I started to notice a woman in jeans making her way slowly up through the holler to us.

When she finally got to where I was sitting, she sat herself down next to me, which was a little startling,

And she started right in talking.

"Beautiful view, isn't it?" she said.

I hadn't noticed. I wasn't in the mood to notice.

But she was right, it was spectacular.

We sat there for a moment, looking out.

And then she said, "How's the work going?"

I almost started crying.

And I blurted out, "we can't work because we dont' have the screws AND we don't have the screws because I forgot them."

There was a pause.

"Okay," she said. "So what does God want you to do instead?"

I looked at her.

"Who **are** you?" I said.

"I'm a nun," she said. "From down in the town.

I'm the one who told this family that they should call ASP for help.

Really nice folks."

That made me feel so much worse.

And then she asked me again:.

"What do you think God wants you to do right now?"

I didn't know what was the right answer to give the nun, but I was pretty sure that

"God wants me to whine and cry some more" was the *wrong* answer.

"Here's what I think," she said. "I think you should go knock on the front door of the house. 'Cause there's a family inside that you should be getting to know ."

So that's what we did.

We knocked on the door, and were welcomed in by folks who were so glad to make us at home.

And we spent the next three hours until those screws showed up sharing stories, and laughing, and listening, and becoming family, one family.

Much later, at the end of the week, after we'd done a lot of good work, this was the day that we all looked back upon with greatest joy.

And it wouldn't have happened had not a nun in blue jeans

wandered up the hill right at that moment and sat herself down.

At ASP, we call those God moments.

Moments when the presence of God is so completely obvious that all you can say in response is

"oh, my"

and "yes"

and "thank you. Thank you, God."

God moments.

It's a new piece of lingo for most people who go on the trip for the first time, not a phrase that most of them have kicked around a whole lot in the hallways of the high school or on the Metro North.

The first night at ASP this year, our young, cheerful, college-age staff person gathered our group together and asked

"So, any God moments today?"

and the freshmen all turned bewildered faces toward me, wondering why I hadn't covered this in the orientations.

And then, then they got it. And they started looking, each day they started listening for God, watching for God.

And at the end of the week, as the bus pulled out of the parking lot - I rode on the freshmen bus --  
a chorus of voices from the back of the bus said  
"Alida, Alida, come here, come here, we want to tell you all our God moments this week!"

And here was one.

Here was a God moment that one freshman girl experienced.

For her crew, it had been a tough week.

The home they were working on was in particularly bad shape, so bad that there were a lot of moments where they had to wonder whether what they were doing would make enough of a difference.

They were putting on a new roof,

and they were installing siding,

but the home had been through a lot,

and they worried whether their fixes would be enough.

And it was tough, too, because the dad of the home worked all day,

so they hadn't had a chance to get to meet him;

and the young mom and her kids were mostly at the grandma's house.

And then came Friday, the Fourth of July.

Joe, the dad, had the day off, so he and his wife Amy came to the house to help our kids.

Which was pretty cool.

And then this happened:

Amy, the young mom, who was helping our kids with the siding, told them this.

"My daddy left this house to me," she told them.

"It was in terrible shape, and he knew that, but before he died he told me that it was his greatest hope that somehow it could be fixed,

and it could be my home, his daughter's home,

and his grandchildren could grow up here.

And after he died, I was in despair,

because we didn't have the money to fix it.

And I prayed, I prayed so hard, I prayed to God in heaven and my daddy there with him.

And the day that I was at my lowest,  
that was the day that the people from ASP came and knocked on my door."  
"You," she said to our kids, "you are the answer to my prayers.  
You are the ones sent by God and by my daddy who still loves me."

And those kids, those kids who hadn't been sure they were doing enough  
or making a difference,  
those kids suddenly knew that they were the answer to someone's prayer,  
suddenly knew that they were the hands of God.  
That was their God moment,  
the one they took home with them and are still talking about.

The Bible, not surprisingly, is full of God moments.  
Michelle read one of my favorites to you this morning.  
It's the story of Jacob,  
when he was probably not any older than any of the kids on the ASP trip,  
running away from home.  
Running away from home because he'd had a huge falling out with his twin brother  
Esau,  
and was in major trouble with his dad Isaac,  
and his mom had told him things were bad enough that he probably ought to get the  
heck out of there.  
And so he does, and he hikes out into the wilderness  
and he doesn't really know where he's headed, and he's gotta be scared.  
And when he gets tired enough,  
he lies down for the night, and rather pitifully takes a stone to use as a pillow,  
and that's when he has the dream.  
The dream whose fame has lasted centuries,  
the dream of a ladder, reaching from earth to heaven,  
a ladder full of angels,  
their wings brushing the place where Jacob lay.  
And from heaven, Jacob dreamed,  
there was a voice that said "I am with you always."  
And the story says that Jacob woke up from his dream,  
and said the words

that we sang earlier -  
Surely the presence of The Lord is in this place.

It was Jacob's *God moment*.  
A dream, a vision, a sense of God's nearness,  
a realization that he wasn't alone, that he would never be alone.  
A God moment, and one that sustained him for the rest of his long journey.

You don't have to be on a mission trip to have a God moment,  
you don't have to be a biblical character to have a God moment.  
A God moment is simply that moment when you recognize  
the presence of God,  
the presence of God in another person,  
the presence of God in the gift of joy or hope or strength,  
the presence of God in that moment when the heaven touches earth,  
and angels run down a ladder to us.

You've had them.  
You, all of you, you've *told* me about your God moments.

One of you told me about the night you picked up your phone,  
and who knows how it happened, but you called the wrong number,  
you called the number of someone you'd stopped speaking to,  
and when they answered you gasped and then you said "I'm sorry, I'm sorry,"  
and that was the beginning of things being right again.  
That was a God moment.

One of you told about the time you were in the hospital,  
being wheeled down for surgery,  
and the nurse touched your shoulder, leaned down and whispered "I'm praying for  
you," and you were flooded with a peace that astonished you.  
That was a God moment.

Moments when what is always true becomes suddenly clear:  
that God is ever present and that God's will for us love.

Moments that give us strength and lift us hope and lead us forward.  
God moments.

Let me be clear:

this is not a sermon about Hallmark Card moments,  
sweet but unimportant moments,  
aw isn't that nice moments.

We need God moments.

God moments are those moments when we see what God yearns for us to see all the  
time:

the presence of God everywhere.

God moments are those moments when we get it --  
or someone helps us to get it.

They are important, because they are glimpses of our lives as God wills them to be,  
glimpses of the world as God intends it to be.

And the world would be as God intends it to be  
if you and I and all God's children  
were open, always, to God's moments.

Last weekend, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began to spiral,  
I read about a God moment --

I don't know how many others saw this story.

The father of the Palestinian boy killed, Abu Khdeir, got on the phone with Yishai  
Frankel, whose nephew Naftali was one of the Israeli boys killed,  
so that they could comfort one another, and grieve together.

God was present in that moment. That was a God moment.

In Jerusalem, Rachel Frankel opened her home to Palestinians who had come to  
express their sorrow to her. That was God's presence, that was a God moment.

And for this world to be filled with the glory of God,  
and the presence of peace,  
we need, all God's children need,  
not only to see those moments and to recognize them as God's,  
but to learn from them. To learn from them.

Surely the presence of The Lord is in this place, said Jacob.  
I can see it. I can see it.

So Look for those God moments, open wide your eyes.  
Because Like Jacob on his journey into a place unknown,  
we too need strength for the road ahead,  
light for our path  
and the sure and certain knowledge that we are never alone.

Amen.