

Spirit of an Old Forest

By Stephen Hastings

“God exhibits himself to the walker in a frosted bush to-day, as much as in a burning one to Moses of old.” – Thoreau, reflecting on his Katahdin experience.

I just can't get enough of Moses – remove the shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.

Last week we pontoon-boated our way around Sebec Lake, beaching ourselves on a small sandy beach surrounded by some pretty old forest – pines mostly - evergreens of great height and age. I'd been having trouble of late sensing “the holy presence” in nature, as I always had. For some reason, boredom had set in – same old same old. And yet:

“All who are filled with an impassioned love for the Light of Life hidden in the ways that give birth and being and growth to the Earth, the Earth, like a mother, will lift up in her arms, to look upon the Face of God.” – Teilhard de Chardin, reflecting on the living, sacred Earth.

On Earth, trees are often viewed as symbols for going closer to God – they reach to the heavens, and the Face of God is up there. And there's truth in that – the eternal, transcendent sense of God. Reach up.

There's also a psalm that says righteousness – or the reflection of divine goodness – is like a cedar – always green and full of sap. And so, there is an inner quality to a tree – the ways of life and birth - that is exemplary to us. Reach in.

Then there's the observation that trees exist as much in the earth – down in the Earth - as they do above the Earth. And so, even the deepest and darkest depths of existence reach for God through the rooted life of that tree, lifting them up like a mother. Reach down.

So, I ventured away from the beach into the old forest, just leaned against an evergreen, and opened up to the sap and spirit of the forest. We all can:

- Reach down ... into the ground – imagine what's there – what's going on – the connections – the touching – the life forms – the life force that enlivens even the dark places ... and in the voice of your spirit say to it all: the whole earth is full of God's glory.
- Reach in ... to the trunk of a tree – travel up from the roots – ascend – travel around from branch to branch and to the tips of pine needles. Then come to the center and say: light of life, always green and full of sap.
- Reach up ... go to the very top; to the highest branch and the tip of the highest needle ... and look out and then up at the sky ... find the bluest blue and say, the streets of heaven are paved in sapphire.

Holy Spirit,

Through you
Clouds billow,
Breezes blow,
Stones drip with trickling streams that are the source of Earth's lush greening.

- Hildegard of Bingen

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