
A Short History of Where the Holy Dwells

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral*
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Some will exclaim, "I experience God on the golf course!" And I am sure they are right. I can appreciate how restorative it is to walk along the fine fairways and greens (and even the trees) on a golf course. I can appreciate the concentration and skill we summon in order to play well. Those are features of an experience of the Holy: a sense of creation larger than us, and a desire to engage the world and to pay attention.

Scripture describes a progression of human experiences of the Holy. We hear that God placed humanity first in the beautiful and fresh Garden of Eden. Upon our exile from that garden, we have been searching for the Holy ever since. And God has been asking the same question ever since, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).

Remembering the garden, we often identified the Holy with natural phenomena like trees and rocks. Around Shechem, there were holy trees that the old prophets called the oaks of Moreh (Genesis 12:6; see also Joshua 24:26 and Judges 9:6,37). After his dream at a place he would call "Bethel," Jacob realized that God was in the place and he didn't know it. Thus, "this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house" (Genesis 28:22).

After Moses' transcendent experience on the mountain, God's people began to experience the Holy in the sacred word, the law, said to be housed in the ark of the covenant. This ark (a rectangular ornate wooden box) became a sacred symbol, to be respected and protected. This was where God resided. And it moved, with God's people, as they journeyed. A transportable tent was then constructed to contain the ark.

Then, scripture says, God's people were moved to make a permanent and stable place for the holy ark of the covenant. This would be the temple, a solid structure worthy of the Holy. This was the very dwelling of God. Horrors! That temple was tragically destroyed in 587 BC! But God's people wonderfully rebuilt it less than a century later.

Over five hundred years after that, Jesus appeared, saying such things as "destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days." He was said to be speaking of the temple of his body. Thus, he was teaching that he, Jesus himself, was the presence of the Holy. The Holy had appeared in the incarnation of a human being. God was in the Body of Christ.

When Jesus was killed and then resurrected, Saint Paul took this image of the Body of Christ a further step. It was not just in the body of Jesus of Nazareth that God resided. The church itself was now the Body of Christ! The Holy is to be found in the very people of God!

Finally, this identification of the Holy with the people of God was made even more explicit in the last book of the bible, that strange Revelation to Saint John: "Behold the dwelling of God is with mortals!" (Revelation 21:3). That is where God lives, with us and in us.

So it is that we, humanity, have experienced the Holy in rocks and trees, in words and promises, in covenants and sacred boxes, in tents and temples, in holy people like Jesus of Nazareth, and even in the ordinary holy people all around us. Maybe when we play golf with people, with people we trust and even love, when we share both their joy and their suffering, then maybe we sense something deep within them that comes close to the Holy. And, if we don't play golf (like me), maybe we can sense the presence of God, the Holy, in every group of people with whom we share awe, and with whom we share intimacy.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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