

## “We Love to Tell the Story”

Exodus 3:1-5 & Hebrews 13:2

In his book, “A Room Called Remember”, Fredrick Buechner says: “The story of Christ is where we all started from....The story of Christ is what once, somehow and somewhere, we came to Christ through...Yet they meet as well as diverge, our stories and Christ’s, and even when they diverge, it is his they diverge from, so that by his absence as well as by his presence in our lives we know who he is and who we are and who we are not. We have it in us to be Christs to each other and maybe in some unimaginable way to God too – that’s what we have to tell finally...And in the meantime, this side of Paradise, it is our business (not like so many peddlers of God’s word but as men and women of sincerity) to speak with our hearts (which is what sincerity means) and to bear witness to, and live out of, and live toward, and live by, the true word of his holy story as it seeks to stammer itself forth through the holy stories of us all.” (Fredrick Buechner. A Room Called Remember: The Two Stories, chapter 5)

Let me tell you a story that is true, and one that still reminds me to take my shoes off from time to time, remembering I am standing on Holy Ground, even on a college campus:

Pillars of fire by night, Clouds by day. These were just two of the ways, that God guided Moses and the Hebrew people through the 40 years of wilderness.

Sometimes, we would like a more visible sign of God’s presence, like the burning bush that God spoke to Moses from to reassure us that we are not alone in our journey through life.

In Celtic spirituality, they like to talk about the “Thin Places.” Places where heaven and earth meet.

I think these “Thin Places” exist all around us if we only open our eyes and hearts to the abiding presence of God - who appears sometimes in a burning bush and sometimes in a person carrying an umbrella.

I spent my first two years living at home, commuting to Vincennes University. So it was with great excitement that I headed off to Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. I was excited! No more living at home! No more living under the watchful eyes of my parents or for that matter the congregation, since we lived in the manse across the country road from the church where my dad served as the pastor. I was finally going to be free to

experience the campus living at its finest along the many adventures that dorm life offered, or so I thought.

The Hick From French Lick, Larry Bird, made the campus hum in 1979, when he lead the Sycamores to the NCAA basketball title game against Magic Johnson and the Michigan State Spartans, but that was the year before I arrived on campus. It was now 1980 and he had moved on to play for the Boston Celtics. As for Terre Haute, well, it was still Terre Haute.

Attending college in Terre Haute was for me, the pits, and believe me, when I say the pits, I mean it. Terre Haute was known for several things: 1) a former mayor who had a "shoot to kill" police policy; 2) an infamous "Red Light" district; 3) a paper mill that made the whole city smell like rotten cabbage!

While I was in college, the comedian Steve Martin called Terre Haute, Indiana, in a famous interview for a certain magazine, the "Most Nowhere Place in America" and "The armpit of Indiana."

The Old Testament Psalmist referred to the place where God did not dwell as "Sheol." I felt the Psalmist was referring to Terre Haute, my new home.

Within two weeks of experiencing the finest of campus life and dorm living, I was homesick. I was so homesick that I could not even eat! I struggled with my classes, in part because I struggled to even go to class.

One morning, I dragged myself out of my dorm bed for an 8 a.m. class. Already late for a class that was all the way across campus, I dressed, and headed out the door only to discover it was raining and I did not have an umbrella!

No matter, the rain would hide the homesick tears running down my check as I walked all by myself, a lonely, solitary student on his way to a class, all the way across campus.

As I walked to class in the rain, another student passed by on the other side of the street. We were two strangers, students going in opposite directions, but only one of us had an umbrella and it sure wasn't me!

Then this stranger did the most remarkable thing. She crossed the street. She spoke to me, offering to walk me to class even though it was in the opposite direction of where she was headed.

Why she did this, I don't know? Who she was, I don't know? If she mentioned her name, I don't remember it. I never saw her again, though I often looked for her.

What I do remember is that this stranger shared her umbrella with me, walking me across campus to my class.

In her act of kindness I discovered that the presence of God existed on the campus of Indiana State in Terre Haute, Indiana!

The writer of Hebrews says: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for you might be entertaining messengers of God unaware."

The poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her poem Aurora Leah, offers these words:

"Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God:  
But only those who see, take off their shoes,  
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries..."

Friends, as Fredrick Buechner said: "We have it in us to be Christs to each other and maybe in some unimaginable way to God too – that's what we have to tell finally...."

Amen.