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“Some Final Thoughts for Celebration Sunday”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

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Excerpts from the book, *“When Spiritual But Not Religious Is Not Enough”* by Lillian Daniel.

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Chapter 25 – I Don’t Have to Prove It (pg. 165)

I can’t prove to you that Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected, nor that he healed people on the Sabbath or that he forgave his tormentors. I can’t prove to you that one God can also be three in one, and that together that force has parted the waters, burned bushes, and fed thousands on short rations. None of this can I prove. But I can tell you that I have faith in it.

I can say it because “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.” I can hope and believe in what is not before my eyes. I don’t have to be logical, and most of all, I don’t have to prove it. Not to you, not to anyone.

In our culture, it seems like people of faith are always on the witness stand being asked to prove things, and we Christians tend to cooperate. We come up with the search for the historical Jesus and scholars who vote on whether Jesus said this or that. Or archaeological studies that will finally prove whether or not Jesus was resurrected. Documentaries on the History Channel draw us in, as if finally we might look reasonable to the viewing public, as though finally we will get our proof.

I’m tired of playing by the dull and pedestrian set of rules, which has everything to do with a litigious, factoid-hungry culture and nothing to do with following Jesus. I don’t come to church for evidence or for a closing argument. I come to experience the presence of God, to sense the mystery of things eternal, and to learn a way of life that makes no sense to those stuck sniffing around for proof.

Chapter 19 – Please Stop Boring Me (127)

On airplanes, I dread the conversation with the person who finds out I am a minister and wants to use the flight time to explain to me that he is “spiritual but not religious.” Such a person will always share this as if it is some kind of daring insight, unique to him, bold in its rebellion against the religious status quo.

Next thing you know, he’s telling me that he finds God in the sunsets. These people always find God in the sunsets. And in walks on the beach. Sometimes I think these people never leave the beach or the mountains, what with all the communing with God they do on hilltops, hiking trails, and...did I mention the beach at sunset yet?

Like people who go to church don't see God in the sunset! Like we are these monastic little hermits who never leave the church building. How lucky we are to have these geniuses inform us that God is in nature. As if we don't hear that in the psalms, the creation stories and throughout our deep tradition.

Being privately spiritual but not religious just doesn't interest me. There is nothing challenging about having deep thoughts all by oneself. What is interesting is doing this work in community, where other people might call you on stuff or, heaven forbid, disagree with you. Where life with God gets rich and provocative is when you dig deeply into a tradition that you did not invent all for yourself.

Being privately spiritual but not religious has become the norm in American culture, and has even made its way into the culture of some of our churches. So while I can't stop these people from talking to me on the airplane, can I at least inform them that they are boring?

Thank you for sharing, spiritual but not religious sunset person. You are now comfortably in the norm for self-centered American culture, right smack in the bland majority of people who find ancient religions dull but find themselves uniquely fascinating. Can I switch seats now and sit next to someone who has been shaped by a mighty could of witnesses instead? Can I spend my time talking to someone brave enough to encounter God in a real human community? Because when this flight gets choppy, that's who I want by my side, holding my hand, saying a prayer, and simply putting up with me, just like we try to do in church.