

ARTICLE FOR GAZETTE

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Orting United Methodist Church

I just returned last week from a trip to India. I found India overwhelming in many ways. Sometimes it was incredibly beautiful and commendable in its desire to hold all life in respect. Sometimes it was beyond comprehension in filth and lack of hope, and what seemed to be degradation of some human beings.

One of the things my husband and I wanted to do in India was to see a tiger in the wild. Now this is what you need if you want to see a tiger in India.

A jeep. The road is rough, steep, and rocky. You have to drive through small streams, and you need a vehicle that can handle it. Also it needs to be open, so you can see clearly. That means no windows. The ride will be rough. Sometimes you have to hold on for dear life to keep from getting knocked around and bruised. Sometimes you have to wait in fear and trembling while you help change a flat tire.

A driver. You need somebody who knows how to navigate the roads, and handle the jeep. One who knows the territory so you don't get lost.

A guide who knows where to look for tigers and can read the signs, can recognize the footprints, pays attention to the sounds and actions of other animals that indicate tiger is near.

The right place. Tigers don't just show up anywhere. They are more likely to appear in a wilderness area, away from the crowds. You shouldn't expect them just to appear in your backyard, although it can happen in India.

The right clothing. A sign as we entered the game reserve in India said, “No bright clothing. Wear subdued clothing that blends with environment.” Then if you are me you must remember the mosquito repellent, sunscreen, hat, dust mask. You definitely have to prepare yourself to see a tiger.

Also have to prepare yourself mentally. Quietness is essential. You stop, wait, listen, then move on to repeat the process. You always watch. You know in your mind what you are looking for and then keep watching and waiting until you see it.

Well, looking for a tiger is like looking for God. Most of us would probably acknowledge that we would like to see God, the one who “framed the tiger’s fearful symmetry,” as William Blake writes in his poem. The one who is more beautiful, more awesome than anything we know. The one whom, when we see, changes our life forever, and we live always in the memory and light of that experience.

Tigers are not easy to see. Some people go on many safaris and never see one. Some people go a whole lifetime without seeing God—but there are things we can do to make it more likely to happen.

Put ourselves in the right vehicle, the church, that is built to navigate the roads that lead to God. The church, like the jeep may be any size, but it must be tough enough to hold together across rocky roads, up and down steep hills, across streams and through dust and brush. Sometimes we just have to hold on tight and trust that it will make it through.

We must be sure we have a the right driver, to take us the places where God is more likely to be seen. That means putting Jesus Christ in the driver’s seat.

We need a guide whom you can trust to read the signs of the presence of God, one who is experienced in faith. This may be a pastor, teacher, or spiritual guide.

We must put ourselves in the place where God lives, the spiritual realm. The scripture tells us to worship God in spirit and in truth.

We should wear the right clothing. Put on the whole armor of God. “Gird your loins with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, put on your feet the equipment of the gospel of peace, take the shield of faith, helmet of salvation,” says St. Paul.

Then listen for the voice of God, discern the spirit of the Lord, wait upon God with patient desire and eager longing. Envision who God is with such fervor and passion that you can’t miss knowing when God draws near to you.

Finally, if you feel that you have missed the experience you so long for, trust the words of the sign that we read as we left the game reserve in India. “You may not have seen me, but please do not be disappointed. I have seen you.”

Yes, we did see a tiger in India. We say five of them, and it was thrilling to see their striking colors, the unflinching stare as they watched us, their graceful way of moving. Yes, it was awesome, but not as awesome as seeing the face of God.