

Faith Mennonite Church
December 4, 2011 – Advent 2
“Awesome deeds we do not expect”

Questions for reflection on Psalm 85

85:1-3 Recall a time when you experienced forgiveness. How did it change the landscape of your life?

85:4-7 What circumstances in our world, or in your life, must rouse God's indignation today?

85:10 What does the world look like when steadfast love (mercy) and faithfulness (truth) meet? When righteousness (justice) and peace (shalom) kiss?

85:12 How are you experiencing the goodness and abundance of God?

Changing the Landscape: A Story of Being Found

Faithfulness rising up; righteousness looking down from the sky --- the text from Psalm 85 reminds me of a landscape view I have carried with me for decades. As a young adult, I was given the great honor of being shown a glimpse of the glory of God in Creation, but I'm starting at the end of the story. Shall we start at the beginning?

One sunny June afternoon, my family had all been fishing together at a lake, deep in the woods, beyond the back 40. The small, unusual lake was a glacial-era remnant, surrounded and slowly being filled in by peat bog. The acreage was, in fact, a textbook demonstration of a geologic and forestation timetable, from bog to brush to soft wood to hard wood trees. We had hiked the trails often, with my father stopping often to demonstrate how to keep track of where one was in the woods, to show where the trail was marked with cloth ties or to note a particular trail guide. The trails we used were a mix of deer trails linking to groomed and cleared trails.

I felt unwell and decided to head back on my own early. I assured all I knew the way, and set off through the bog and woods; an overly confident 20-something, oblivious of mortality. Before long, I had the sense I wasn't on the primary trail; I was on *a* trail, so I wasn't concerned. After awhile longer, I knew I may be lost, and concern now registered. A little while later, I knew I *was* lost and started to backtrack; panic was beginning to drive my decision-making. I recalled the local bear stories, the coming storm, and wondered how big 180 acres was and knew I was smaller.

I called out for help but my voice went NOWHERE in the midst of a dense pine forest. Intelligently, I stopped. I prayed; I looked up and my answer came quickly. If I climbed *up*, my voice would carry *over* the treetops. One should picture very tall mature pines trees everywhere.

I selected one and began the climb, ignoring sap and spiders. Resting on the highest bough that would hold my weight, with the breeze swaying the slender bit of tree trunk I clung to, I could see I wasn't high enough yet. I called out but words were swallowed whole by the trees around. A taller tree

was just beyond---I'd have to climb that one. Undaunted, I climbed down and back up, only to learn I'd chosen the wrong tree. I climbed down again, hope fading with the light of day and panic rising with the incoming storm winds.

Climbing up once again, I made it to the top of the tree that soared above all the other treetops and there I saw a view of a sea of lush, green treetops, as far around me as I could see, meeting the stunning blue of a summer sky with artistically measured dollops of creamy white clouds scattered around. And from that glorious vantage point, I could see my fishing family on the edge of the backwoods lake, barely! I began calling for help, pushing my voice up over the treetops and, before long, an answer came back.

“Keep calling!” my family encouraged me. “We’ll find you if you keep calling out.” (It worked.)

Changing the landscape, in a way I have never done again, saved me from possibly being quite lost for a long time, or worse! The decision to climb the trees---despite the risks, the first and second failures and the spiders and sap along the way---opened the way for me to find the help I needed. And the gift of an extraordinary view of the forest was given for me to keep forever.