

Finding God at Starbucks

Westina Matthews

On a spiritual retreat that included thirty-six hours of sacred silence, I began my daily ritual of walking one morning and had to confront an unexpected dilemma. My usual walking route took me through a wooded area to a residential community and eventually to Starbucks. Having the time to enjoy a cup of coffee and read *The New York Times* was a great luxury for me—a welcome respite from typically busy days back home. On this particular Sunday morning, I was torn about whether or not I could go to Starbucks and still maintain sacred silence. Slipping folded bills and the note on which was written “grande decaf, leave room for milk” into my back pocket, I started out on my walk. As each footstep drew me closer to Starbucks, questions arose. Can silence be found at Starbucks? Is there sacredness in a cup of java? Is it sacrificial not to have the coffee? Will it be a higher ground or higher grounds?

Somewhere along the way, I began to think that perhaps I was searching for answers about something that did not require this much angst in my soul. God is not in the cup of coffee. God is in ME. If my questioning is centered on the so-called godliness or ungodliness of having a cup of coffee, it would seem that I am missing the more compelling question around “to be or not to be” one with God. “Let the beauty we love be what we do,” wrote thirteenth century Persian teacher and poet, Rumi, “There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” Yes, there are hundreds of ways to be with God. God can be experienced kneeling by one’s bedside, kneeling in a pew, or “kneeling” in the bathroom stall at work. It can be experienced kissing a loved one, “kissing” the air, or “kissing” a cup of Starbucks coffee. It is not important where we kneel but that we kneel. It is not important how we kiss but that we kiss. What is most important is that we continually strive to do God’s will in all of our ways, and “let the beauty we love be what we do.”

I work on Wall Street. Finding God at Starbucks is a much easier task than finding God in a stock quote, in a merger or acquisition, or in an Excel spreadsheet. Can spirituality be in the workplace when the job is so financially driven? When I began my studies in spiritual direction, I sensed an open and honest suspicion from my classmates—many wondering how someone from the financial industry could be interested in nurturing a spiritual heart or what kind of calling to the ministry of “holy listening” this might be? Initially, some even questioned whether people in business could be religious and moral. In their minds, contemplation of spirit simply could not occur when one is paid to contemplate profit and loss statements! Skepticism abounded openly and prayerfully—and I humbly embraced it, searching for reaffirmation that I was in the right place at the right time. The call upon my heart to become a spiritual companion has come out of a desire to deepen my relationship with God and to companion others in the business world who shares a similar desire.

Over the course of my studies—and through the time I have spent with my directees, my peer group, and in spiritual direction myself—I have begun to understand that there is a difference between “work” and a “job.” Listening to my directees (or more often than not, in conversations with my colleagues by the water cooler, in the elevator banks, or over lunch) I have consistently heard them pondering where God is in their jobs. When I quietly ask, “What has God called you to do in your work—not your job, but your work? I find they can begin a new level of conversation with God. It is only when they start to expand their understanding of their view of work that they are led to a deeper understanding of how it is they can find God in their jobs. Job, calling, and work are inextricably intertwined in the search for peace and in deepening our relationship with God. My job today is to be a managing director for a financial firm. I believe my calling is to lead, to speak, to write, and to love. My work as a spiritual companion is an answer to this call. I am happy to report that by the time I completed my studies, my classmates had begun to believe, accept, and support my calling. On the final day of retreat, one spiritual companion, hugging me tightly whispered in my ear, “I feel better now, knowing that you are on Wall Street.”

Let me close this where I began—on my way to Starbucks. That Sunday morning on a hot summer day in early July, I did go into Starbucks and order my cup of coffee, thanking God for the hands that prepared and served it and blessing the hands that were holding the cup. I have long since returned home from my retreat but I have continued my early morning walks and my tradition of stopping at the neighborhood Starbucks for my first cup of coffee. I have concluded that it is possible to find God at Starbucks, at our jobs, in our work; through our calling because God is with us and within us...we take God wherever we go.

Westina Matthews, Ph.D., is a managing director at a Wall Street firm and a graduate of the Spiritual Guidance Program at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. She connects with others through her series of poignant spiritual books based on the mustard seed parable.

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