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Adoration in an Unexpected Place

By the Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

Over the past couple of weeks, I have been exploring and rekindling my interest in genealogy. It is powerful to mine the Internet to see what one can find about one's family and heritage. I have learned many fascinating things as I have chased new connections and family trees.

I have been unfailingly moved as I see those names, which are usually only accompanied by their birth and death dates, and perhaps their children's names. It seems important to stop and consider that those dates represent a whole life. I start to wonder who they were – what they cared about, what excited them, what worried them, how they felt about getting older, and so much more. What gave them their greatest joys? Did they ever feel like they were at the end of their rope? Did they ever wonder how they could go on? How did they ask forgiveness when they had hurt someone? Did they ever wonder if God could forgive them, yet again? Did they like to sing, or run in the rain, or smell fresh-cut hay?

Then I try to imagine all of this from God's perspective, which is, of course, impossible. But our faith tells us that God knew, cared, and continues to care passionately about each and every one of them. As the Scripture and the Gospel song say, "His eye is on the sparrow" (Luke 12:6-7).

I marvel at how bits of those ancestors are flowing through my veins and, somehow, very much affecting my own story and how I see the world. I start thinking about somebody, some descendent in the future looking at my dates, and how they might wonder what this world was like for me.

I can get overcome by the sheer mystery of it all. This is the kind of stuff to discuss around a campfire or fire pit with a good friend. But it is also the kind of marveling and wondering we can take to God.

I think exploring this mystery of our family heritage in this world is another kind of prayer, akin to adoration. It's a different realm of prayer than petition (asking for what we need); intercession (praying for others); thanksgiving; or confession; important and necessary as all of those are. Adoration prayer is marveling at this world, our humanity, and the richly intricate family histories that precede every one of us. And seeing, somehow, that all those stories are bound up and given meaning in the God who loves us so much.

I feel humbled and awed by all those names I have come across – the wars some have fought in, the journeys, the previous pandemics, the depressions, some who lived in poverty, some who seemed to have quite an influence, and on and on.

I feel I owe something to them – respect, that I try to grow, to grasp God's grace, and never to take for granted the fleeting gift of life itself.

Several of you thanked me for the music from Carrie Newcomer in my last *Simple Gifts* meditation. I'm still getting to know her music, but I'm finding it often has a hauntingly beautiful, deeply real quality which regularly speaks to some of the deepest emotions. "A Gathering of Spirits" seems to offer musically some of what I am experiencing as I explore my family heritage.

[Gathering of Spirits "An Evening With Carrie Newcomer" - Bing video](#)

I mentioned the scripture verse of God caring even for the sparrow. I just have to offer this classic recording from the late, great Mahalia Jackson, singing the classic Gospel favorite, "His Eye is On the Sparrow."

[Mahalia Jackson - His Eye Is On The Sparrow - Bing video](#)