

Message: God is Present, Are You?

I believe God is present in the world today. Do you?

The answer to that question requires a little bit more than the quick response “of course.” It requires an informed heart, mind and conscience. We find that through prayer, reading and reflecting on God’s Word and its impact on our lives. I’m not saying this to create any barriers, but to say that believing Jesus is our Savior isn’t a trivial or frivolous matter.

Today’s reading from John 17 makes the case. This is Jesus’ last recorded prayer. Jesus is praying for the disciples. Jesus is more concerned about them than himself. He’s sure of his own path and the victory over death to come. The disciples’ path is much less certain. On their own, they are most likely to fail. In fact, Jesus has predicted that. We know the results. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. And the other disciples ran away and hid in fear.

Even though he knew what was going to happen, Jesus prays with confidence for the disciples. He prays for them to be kept true by God’s power. He prays they will be present and responsive when the call to minister to others comes. Jesus prays this for four reasons.

First, God gave the disciples to Jesus. Second, the disciples followed God’s Word. Third, the disciples accepted the message Jesus gave them. In spite of their misunderstandings or failings, the disciples truly believed Jesus came from God. He was God’s answer to a people who were crying out for mercy and justice. Finally, Jesus prayed for the disciples because he knew the terrible test they would face in the next few days. It’s hard to have joy in the middle of conflict or crisis, but when we know God is at work, we can find hope in our expectancy.

From the time they were called, the disciples responded to Jesus without hesitation. They walked away from their homes, jobs and families to follow Jesus. They suffered ridicule, hardship and doubt as they followed him. But their faith grew over the three years they were with him. Peter showed his growing faith with these words, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God*” (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus’ reply? “*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but [God] in heaven*” (v17). God’s love for us is revealed to us in a life-changing way. God loves us so much that God came down to Earth to be with us. God is present with us, every day, now and forever. That’s the gift, the good news of Jesus. That’s a message worth sharing with everyone we meet.

We can share the apostles’ hope. Jesus prays for us and intercedes for us in heaven. We, too, are given by God to be Jesus’ disciples. We, too, can follow God’s Word. We, too, can accept the message Jesus gives us. Jesus says to us, “*Believe in me. Turn to God and ask for forgiveness in my name. You’ll receive the gift of eternal life.*” In spite of our misunderstandings or failings, we believe Jesus came from God. We believe Jesus is God’s answer to a people who are crying out for mercy and justice. We, too, need Jesus’ prayer for the terrible tests we face in our day and time. The world no longer holds Christianity as the source for truth and love. The first, modern generation has been born who doesn’t believe Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus prays for us. He prays for all of us to remain connected to him. Jesus prays for all who show their love for him by the way they live. Jesus’ faith gives us the strength and courage to hold onto our faith.

We can trust and love God. That’s because God is loving, kind, steadfast, gentle, patient, faithful and joyful. God isn’t far off, distant and uncaring, blind to what’s going on or deaf to our prayers. God isn’t abusive, twisting the hearts and minds of people to dark purposes. God isn’t a perfectionist, setting us up to fail with impossible standards that we can’t meet. God is here with us. God laughs with us. God cries with us. God’s heart breaks when wrongs are done. God forgives us when we ask and even when we don’t. God loves us, unconditionally, for all time. And God is always at work, creating opportunities for us to turn to God and hear God’s call to minister to others in love.

Jesus prays this: “[God], I spelled out your character in detail to the men and women you gave me. They were yours in the first place; then you gave them to me, and they have now done what you said. They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that everything you gave me is

firsthand from you, for the message you gave me, I gave them; and they took it, and were convinced that I came from you. They believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I’m not praying for the God-rejecting world but for those you gave me, for they are yours by right. Everything mine is yours, and yours mine, and my life is on display in them”
(John 17:6-8, The Message).

Jesus loves you. He has revealed God’s greatest promise and desire for us: that we would accept God’s love and return it, freely and willingly. That’s the way that gives life and fills us with light. When we turn away, it’s of our own accord. We refuse to believe human eye witnesses. We refuse to believe God’s voice telling us Jesus is God’s son. When we do, we call God a liar, we reject Jesus as God’s son and, even worse, we’re rejecting life. We’re embracing darkness and death instead.

There’s hope. No matter where you find yourself today. No matter what you may hear from a family member or loved one. No matter what may be said by peers and colleagues. No matter what your friends do. No matter what you may hear or read on TV, radio, the internet or social media. There’s a truth that has been revealed. God is with us. God is present, now, today. Jesus came to save us from sin and death by his love. Whenever we’re ready, Jesus is there, waiting to forgive us.

Jesus is present today. He’s listening. There are many ways to experience Jesus’ love and grace. We can do it at church or Christian camp or on mission projects or through the life events we all experience. I believe Jesus’ love is revealed most in the closest relationship we have: our relationship with our mother.

I invite you to reflect for a moment on your relationship with your mother. I realize that all mothers are not the same and relationships can be strained or even broken. However, most of us have someone we think of fondly when we hear the word “mother.”

What makes that relationship special? If we had the time, it would be wonderful to go around the room and hear the unique reasons each of us has. If you’ll permit me, let me offer one thing that I believe is true in every case. Presence. Your mother is present for you. That’s love in action. No matter how crazy the day may be (or we may be), Mom is

present. She's willing to set aside her own interests, tasks and concerns to listen to us, deeply and carefully. Moms seem to have a knack for asking just the right question at the right time. That's not by accident. It comes from listening not just to what we say, but to what we mean. It takes true care and love to see and hear all of us – our heart, mind, body and soul.

When we love and are loved, caring for others becomes natural.

We want to be with them, to be present. When that love and care come from a deeply spiritual place, rooted in God's unfailing love, ministering to others becomes a way of life. We want to be present for them and to have them with us when we gather. Mary's words to the angel Gabriel came from that place, “*Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38). Her faithful love and willingness to answer God's call changed the world.

If we are faithful and loving, ready to answer God's call, we, too, will respond without hesitation. I pray you're ready. I invite you to accept God's love. Open yourself and let your spirit rest in God's presence. Then share that gift of eternal love by being present for others. That's the ministry of Jesus Christ. That's what draws us back each week to gather and worship God, to be in God's presence.

You have the power to change the world, one life at a time.

Are you ready to follow Jesus?

Let us pray ...

“*O God, I feel like you're absent from my life. I've been going my own way for too long. My way hasn't helped me with my problems, my life seems empty. I need a new way. I want to know your love. I need to feel your presence. Forgive me for the wrongs I have done.. Come into my life and save me through your mercy and grace. I pray this in the name of the One whose name is above all, Jesus Christ. Amen.*”

John 17:6-8, 13-19 (CEB)

I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

Now I'm coming to you and I say these things while I'm in the world so that they can share completely in my joy. I gave your word to them and the world hated them, because they don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world. I'm not asking that you take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. They don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world. Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. I made myself holy on their behalf so that they also would be made holy in the truth.

1 John 5:9-13 (CEB)

If we receive human testimony, God's testimony is greater, because this is what God testified: he has testified about his Son. The one who believes in God's Son has the testimony within; the one who doesn't believe God has made God a liar, because that one has not believed the testimony that God gave about his Son. And this is the testimony: God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son. The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have God's Son does not have life.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of God's Son so that you can know that you have eternal life.