

God Is With Us

Good morning. Please pray with me. "Dear Lord, we honor you today as a community of hope and faith. Our hearts reach out to you; our minds and souls are yours. Bless this church; bless this congregation. Bless our world. We pray this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen."

Most of you know me pretty well. You know I'm one of those odd people that actually enjoys reading philosophy books. I also enjoy reading the Bible. I'm not saying I understand everything I read, but I do enjoy it! I remember one of my students asking me one day "Why should I read philosophy? Everyone has one!" So, playing a bit of the devil's advocate (don't get the wrong idea, that's just a saying), I asked him "Well, if your philosophy disagrees with someone else's philosophy, whose right?" "Well", he said "I am!" I remember thinking to myself at the time, I'm not going to win this argument.

In my other semi-philosophical sermons we explored the existence and function of the soul, the purpose of life, morality, the things we could do and should do. But there is something else I want to explore today. Something I think you'll all agree with, and relate to. I fully and firmly believe there is a just and loving God. I believe God is present in our world and in our lives. I also think He communicates with us, and we communicate with Him. I don't think of God as an abstract concept; I think He is a living presence in our world. He cares about humankind, and He is always there for us.

Listen to these words from Proverbs, Chapter 3, verses 5-6:

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And lean not on your own understanding.

6. In all your ways acknowledge Him. And He shall direct your paths.

But some might ask: How do you know He is here? How do we communicate with Him?", "Where is He?".

How do we know that God is here? I need only look out at this beautiful world, at the majesty of this creation, and I know something far greater than myself is involved. I look to the universe and I see an intrinsic beauty, an order, a design. And I see the hand of a great presence, a great Designer. The physical world, the very universe itself, is a testament to a Divine plan, a creative presence, a transcendent reality that underlies all of creation. The sheer magnitude, majesty, and intricate design of the physical realm evidences the Creator, His presence, His power, and His glory. I quote Psalm 27, verse 13, "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

But there is an even stronger, more immediate type of evidence. That is the evidence of your own experience - the evidence in your very heart. God is not a mere thought; God is a living presence in each and every one of us. When I look inward I can feel that presence; I know He is there. It is difficult to explain how I know that, but that knowledge is as certain as my own existence. The modern psychology books speak of emotional intelligence, intuitive ability. And it is this level of the psyche, this part of the soul, that is the wellspring of this knowledge and certainty. I'm reminded of a film of an interview with the psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Jung is considered the father of depth psychology, he pioneered research on the unconscious, dream interpretation, and the structure of the psyche. The interviewer asked Jung how he knew God existed. Jung's answer was simple but certain, "I know, I know." He said this in a way that transcended the mere dialogue, but evidenced the certainty of his knowledge.

In my heart I feel this power too, this sense of peace, this loving presence, all of which are greater than myself – they seem to lie beyond me, yet are a part of me too. I have no doubt that many of you feel this same presence in your hearts as well. This carries with it a certainty, an inner knowledge, something far beyond mere sensation. It lies at the core of our collective humanity, our collective soul.

I call on this inner strength in times of sorrow, in times of great emotional need, in times of uncertainty. It is well stated in the first verse of Psalm 46, “God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble.” And again in Psalm 55, verse 22: “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you.” I know the truth of these words from personal experience.

In 2004 I lost my Mother and my Father. They were two in a series of 5 deaths in the family that year. Despite the emotional difficulty, the sorrow, the grief, I found an inner strength and eventually an inner calm. Prayer strengthened this feeling – I felt buoyed, I felt some of the weight lifted from my shoulders. I knew the Lord was with me; I could feel Him in my heart. My faith grew stronger, and as it did so, too, did I grow stronger. The Good Lord carried me through the most difficult year of my life, and I am all the better for it.

I know many of you have experienced this inner reality for yourselves. I also know that everybody here wants to have the Lord in their heart. I know everybody here can feel God’s Love in their soul. It is written in the Book of John, chapter 4, verse 16, “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” It starts very simply – by accepting Jesus into your heart. Our Savior, our salvation. God’s Grace, Gods Love. These are so very important, and can be yours. Open the eyes of you heart.

Our faith not only gives us strength, but it opens this door to the Lord. "For" as it is said in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 7 "we walk by faith, not by sight". Chapter 11, verse 1 of Hebrews tells us "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". You don't just have faith, you are faith. It is a powerful emotion; it is a powerful emotional connector. We commune with our Lord through faith. We communicate with our Lord through our faith, through our hearts, through our prayers.

Now I warned you I like philosophy, so forgive me as I share a connection here. Plato was an interesting philosopher. I'm sure you've all heard of him. He wrote a very interesting allegory, known as the Allegory of the Cave. A quick version of the story goes something like this: Imagine some men have been tied up in a cave their entire lives, with their heads facing a wall. They cannot turn around, but there is a fire behind them, and as people pass by behind them shadows are cast on the wall. These shadows reflect the people passing by, the objects they're carrying, some of the things they wear like hats, swords, and so on.

Now imagine one of those men gets free and makes his way out of the cave, only to be overcome by the light of the sun as he exits the cave. And as he regains his sight he comes to see the real world for what it is - he sees people, he sees the things they wear, he sees the things they carry, and he is literally astounded. It is truly an amazing experience. Now, if he were to return to the cave and tell the other men what he saw, they would think he was crazy. Their experience of the world is only their shadow world, that's all they know. This man has reached a new level of understanding and insight. The shadow world is no longer real.

I won't explore where Plato was taking his allegory, we'll save that for another time. But this is a perfect allegory for each and every one of us that calls ourselves a Christian - a perfect allegory of becoming a Christian.

Many of us have dwelled in the shadow-world, often a world of doubt, fear, anger, self-interest and self-absorption. Some may have doubted the existence of God, others may have doubted that Jesus is our Savior. But as we mature, as we gain more experience in and with our world, we begin to recognize something greater than ourselves is present in our world. We begin to sense a presence, and a purpose. Our soul awakens, and connects with something beyond itself.

As the reality of the existence of the Lord dawns on us we are much like that man when he exits the cave. We are overwhelmed, we are amazed. We, too, are momentarily blinded by the light of the Son...the light of Jesus, the Son of God. I feel the Lord's presence in my life. And I am humbled by it. I see His hand at work in my world. And I am amazed. I see the glory and beauty of God's creation. And I am truly overwhelmed. I have faith. I am faith. I am the better Christian when I let God into my heart; I feel the reality; I know the reality of our Loving God. Jesus walks in me, with me, he has united me with my Lord.

I suspect many of us have had this experience. It's why I'm not afraid or shy to say "I am a Christian". Sometimes this experience, this inner knowledge, builds up gradually over a period of years. Sometimes it's a single event, hitting us like a bolt of lightning. But knowing the Lord is in your heart, feeling that presence by you, in you, is a powerful experience - the most positive, uplifting, joyous experiences one can ever have. Where is God? He is everywhere. He is in the world. He is here; He is in your heart.

I entreat you to accept your faith, to be your faith. Faith is an implicit part of your very soul. Believe in the Lord - He is as real as you are. Allow God's Grace and Love to shine in your heart and warm those around you. There is a God. He is a loving presence in you, and in the world. God is with us today, He is with you today, and every day. May the light of God's Grace and Love shine on you, through you, and continue to bless you. Amen.