

The Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 20, 2020

Luke 1:26:38
"Presence"

Grace, Peace, and Good Health be with you always from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

When people suffer, where is God? Where is God as people lie in death beds, refugee camps, or the throws of depression? Let's get right to the point, we are in a global pandemic people are sick, they are dying and we are tired of living like this. Where is God now?

In the Old Testament reading assigned for today, King David, like all the people of the time, believed God was associated with a large box called the Ark of the Covenant. That ark had to be carried about and at night a tent was put up over it. So David decided it was not right he lived in a house but that God lived in a tent. So he set out to build the Temple but the prophet Nathan explains that God does not need a house he will always be His people.

The problem, of course, is that King David thinks God is limited to a place, a box. Maybe it is comforting to David to think that God is always nearby in the Ark. Or maybe, it is comforting to David that God is contained in a box, out of the way and under control. But, before we go making fun of the Hebrew tribes for thinking God is in a building let's remember how frustrated that we are that we can't all gather together in our churches, singing carols, lighting candles, and greeting each other with a hearty handshake or a warm embrace. I am guilty of being in despair that we can't gather for worship forgetting that God is wherever the faithful are. Forgetting that for hundreds of years there were no churches. It was the time of the Roman occupation so when it was not safe for Christians to gather in large groups they worshipped at home.

The disciples, St. Paul, the first great teachers of the Church never saw a Christian church building.

This truth, that God is always with God's people, has been a hard lesson for God to teach. God was with Abraham and Sarah when they traveled to the Promised Land, with Joseph when his brothers sold him to slavery, with Hebrews in bondage in Egypt, with Moses wandering in the wilderness. God has always been shown us that God is always with us. My wife is a fifth grade teacher, and when a student doesn't get the lesson because they just aren't paying attention she might say "that child is not an engaged learner. For thousands of years when God tries to teach us that He is always with us – God's children have not been "engaged learners."

Today's Gospel reading from Luke is commonly called "the annunciation." It is about how the angel, Gabriel, "announced" to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah. But more than that, it is the announcement that God will show us love in a new way. God will send his Son fully God and fully human to live like us, to eat and drink like us, to laugh like us, to heal our sick, to mourn for our dead, to raise our dead and to die because of us and rise from the dead for us, for the forgiveness of our sins. Listen to what Martin Luther wrote in his Christmas book:

Look upon the baby Jesus. Divinity may terrify man. Inexpressible majesty will crush him. That is why Christ took on our humanity, save for sin, that he should not terrify us but rather that with love and favor he should console and confirm.

The God who came to dwell with us as a baby, teach us as a rabbi and die like us on the cross is not going to ever abandon us. Where is God? God is with the scientists working on a vaccine, with the health care workers caring for the sick, with the lonely comforting them, with the grieving promising them resurrection.

I know that you are frustrated with masks, distancing and especially that we cannot safely gather in our churches, this is especially hard at Christmas. I am frustrated too. But let's remember what we are missing are our friends, our traditions, our comfortable places. We are not missing Jesus because Jesus never left us. Jesus does not live in a church, Jesus lives with the faithful whenever, wherever they are.

This Gospel, this annunciation, announces Jesus will be born, the annunciation announces that God is present with us this day and always.

Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds on Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

Soli Deo Gloria