

3 Lent: March 27, 2011

St Stephen's, San Jose

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Week 3; God is Closer Than You Think: Partnering with God

Exodus 17:1-7                   The Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord.

Psalms 95

Romans 5:1-11                 God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

John 4:5-42                    The Samaritan woman at the well. True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

Today begins the third week of our exploring on Sunday and in small groups that God is closer than you think.

Wk One: God's greatest desire is to be with us. The Bible is filled with story after story of God seeking to be with us.

Wk Two: God is everywhere, but we have to look for Him. We have to pay attention, even in the times and places we would not expect God to be; to listen, to watch, and to be open to God throughout our day.

This week: Recognizing God's presence involves partnering with God

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus told the woman at the well, "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." If we look ahead a few chapters, the Gospel writer John explains what this special water is that Jesus offers.

John 7:39 says, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."

Through Jesus' ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit came to live with us as a power of divine encouragement and comfort. But more than being here with us, this passage from John says that God's Spirit flows within us; like a natural spring, bubbling with life and energy. By our learning to help God's Spirit flow through us, we can align our spirit with God's Spirit. Like someone paddling a raft down a fast mountain river, steering to use the power of the river, we can learn to work in partnership with God's Spirit; to maximize the flow of God's Spirit through us. We can partner with God to make us more aware of God's presence.

So let's look at some ways that you can align yourself, your spirit, to be in partnership with God's Spirit; maximizing the flow of God's living water through you.

First, consider that the greatest moment of your life is right now. Not because it is especially pleasant or happy or easy, but because this moment is the only moment you have. Every past moment is gone. It is never coming back. As attractive as it might be, living in the past is a waste. And the future is 'out there' somewhere. You can easily spend your lifetime waiting for tomorrow. But **THIS** moment is God's irreplaceable gift to you. And **THIS** moment is where God is. And in this moment God offers to partner with you. So don't miss the opportunity that is **NOW**.

Looking at this concept of ‘the present’ in another way, every moment of our lives can be a sacrament. God is present in this instant, offering to partner with us in whatever we face. Our failure to embrace “the sacrament of the present moment” will keep us from being fully present to God right here, right now.

We don’t have temples in our homes. In our faith, we honor the Sabbath, setting apart sacred time, rather than a sacred place. How can you be more intentional about providing sacred time to think about God’s presence in your day, to listen for His whispers of guidance, to commit your day as an offering to God, telling Him that you dedicate your day to what GOD wants to be done with it?

Then there is the issue of our chronic sleep deprivation. Arranging to get enough sleep is an act of discipleship. The French monk Brother Lawrence wrote, “Those who have the wind of the Holy Spirit in the sails glide ahead even while asleep.” I think this describes a peaceful sleep based in the comfort of feeling close to God; and not sleep that comes from exhausted collapse. We are a culture that needs more sleep. Use your DVR; go to bed earlier. (Taylor)

Let yourself be still; giving yourself the chance to practice God’s presence in your day. That may mean getting up only 10 minutes earlier than you do, to have time to read a daily reflection, like Forward Day by Day. It may mean putting a Post It note on the mirror in your bathroom, reminding you that as you brush your teeth in the morning you tell God ‘Good Morning, God’, and you ask God to be present in your day. If you are particularly courageous one day, you dedicate your day to what God wants to happen.

Feed your mind by remembering some key Scripture passages;  
 Nothing can separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38)  
 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)  
 God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)  
 (Get my on-line notes for the Scripture references.)  
 Reflect on that simple passage during your day.

At the end of the day, review your day with God. Where you have goofed up, ask for forgiveness. Where you have seen blessings, tell God ‘Thank you’. If we accept that each day is a gift, how deliberate are we about unwrapping the gift, seeing what it is, and really enjoying it? Our lives are so filled up. They are so overflowing that we can likely not notice ‘in the moment’ the jewel of a day it has been. But if we are deliberate about using the quiet of our getting ready for bed, or those twilight moments before we are asleep to recount where God has been with us in our day, we can know that we have unwrapped God’s gift.

Your life as a dedicated Christian does not REQUIRE getting up at 4 am to read all seven volumes of Richard Hooker’s writings ‘On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity’. It does not REQUIRE becoming a nun or a monk or a cleric. It does not require exhausting yourself trying to earn God’s appearing in your life. Just do the things you normally do, but do them with God. Align your spirit with God’s Spirit. Let the river of living water that Jesus spoke about do more

than flow into you, but to flow through you. Teach yourself to partner with God, in the present moment, moment by moment, and see how close God really is. Amen.

Forward Day by Day

<http://forwardmovement.org/Today-s-Meditation/>

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J. Philip Newell

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