

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

May 11, 2014

More Reflections on Emmanuel – God with Us

Ps 31:1-5 & 15-16 and Matthew 1:22-23
(373, 644, 634, 648)

A young colleague in ministry back in Ontario,
Matthew Ruttan of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Barrie,
wrote a blog this week on the subject of anxiety.
Another seasoned colleague here in Vancouver,
Tony Plomp of Fairview Presbyterian Church,
shared that blog on Facebook.
Then I read it and shared it.

Welcome to the twenty-first century.
This one of the primary ways
in which ideas spread these days.
For someone like me who loves to play with ideas,
I'm most grateful for this new form of conversation.
It will never replace the connections that we enjoy face-to-face,
but it is a blessed complement.

*News cycles, books, television/commercials and the internet
are often driven by the novelty and morbid-fascination with fear-driven content.
We take the bait.*

And our brains pay for it.

*Maybe some anxiety comes from thinking about a looming world war,
or environmental concern. Maybe it's a family issue or problem at work.
Or an exam, bills or people-pleasing.
Maybe a looming question about existence or purpose,
or a deep [concern] that we are unliked or unloved.*

Matthew concludes the blog with these words:

But you don't have to suffer at the hands of an invisible terrorist alone.

He has four suggestions for being proactive in dealing with anxiety.
First, cultivate silence – turn off the anxious voices of our culture.
Second, seek help – don't remain isolated in your fear.
Third, care for yourself – cultivate daily habits that give you wings.
Fourth, rely on God – believe that his healing and healthy energy is with and for you.

Centuries ago, another colleague in ministry,
Augustine, who was a bishop in Hippo in northern Africa,
recognized and wrote about much the same thing in his *Confessions*.
His conclusion, passed on down through generations in the church,
Went something like this:

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

The *Confessions* tell a compelling story
of Augustine's desperate search for fulfillment and joy.
He works his ways through excessive pleasures,
all kinds of religious and philosophical systems,
and futile attempts to distract himself from his depression.
These efforts to redeem himself left him exhausted and weary.
In the midst of that misery, God broke into his distraction
and revealed the reality and power of his presence.
Augustine's eyes were opened and he saw reality clearly.

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

We've explored before here at Brentwood
the recurring theme in the Bible
that basically has God saying to his beloved human beings,
"Fear not, I am with you."

That's the message of this sermon.
Six simple words that we too often ignore.
Six simple words that we too often make so complex they confuse us.
Six simple words that we too often mute and mangle to avoid change.
"Fear not, I am with you."

Let's do something a bit different this morning,
something that the Spirit invites us to do
through Matthew's blog.

We are here in church this morning,
drawn into community with Jesus Christ and each other
by God's continuing and steadfast love and desire that we flourish.

This is a safe place, a safe community,
in which to be honest about our fears.

So, I'm going to stop talking and create a bit of silence
for you to reflect on your own.

Here's the first question for your reflection:

What has frightened you most this week?
[leave two minutes of silence]

And here's the second question for your reflection:

*What difference can you imagine God being with you making
in your response to that fear?*
[leave another two minutes of silence]

As Victor Frankle wrote reflecting on his fears in a Nazi concentration camp,
"Between stimulus and response, there is always room for choice."

That's how God made us.

And the choice that brings the deepest and most resilient sense of well-being
is the choice to find our rest in God.

It's the choice to rely on God with every breath we take.

It's the choice to accept God's invitation to live in Jesus Christ.

I trust the Spirit has helped you this morning
clarify what kinds of fears are plaguing you
and how God's loving presence helps you overcome those fears,
how God nourishes your souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Look more intentionally this week on signs that God is with you.

Draw more intentionally this week on the power of that presence.

Use that power of love more intentionally this week

to touch others with the compassion that is the gift of God being with you.

And stay in touch with God more intentionally this week through prayer.