

Church of the Redeemer / Greenville  
 Sermon: July 8<sup>th</sup>  
 The Reverend Mark Moline

John writes of his revelation, **“I heard a voice saying, “See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.”**

Today’s Gospel presentation is the familiar story of Christ’s return to his hometown of Nazareth. God wanted to dwell among mortals, but this is the story of mortals rejecting the presence of God. They had heard of the miracles he had worked in other cities and towns – and they wanted him to perform, to produce, to entertain. We read of this event and we see the presence of God Incarnate. They saw the presence, not of the living God, but of the local carpenter. Their unbelief blinded their understanding of the great significance of God’s presence among them.

I entered seminary with the naïve expectation that I would learn a verbal formula – that is I would learn the appropriate words - for comforting the frightened sufferer and even those devastated by grief. I thought that as a priest, I would go out armed with just the right strategic Bible passages and the most effective words to use to bring God’s comfort, blessing and presence to those who were hurting.

As a police officer I had made my first death notification at age 23 and I will never forget it. It was followed by many others over the years, and I always knew that I didn’t have the best words for those in need of spiritual and emotional care. Then – years later in seminary I learned that **there is no such formula**.

When everything is said and done, it is simply our prayerful and loving presence that may help a little.

I actually recognized and accepted this truth **“only”** when I was on the receiving end – when it was me doing the hurting. It was not until the first of three back-to-back surgeries that I truly valued the spiritual significance and merit of even **meager human presence**, much less Christ’s presence.

On several occasions during my first hospital stay, I awoke in the darkness of the night or early morning hours, drugged, confused and scared only to hear the breathing of my then thirty-four year old son asleep in the chair beside my hospital bed. During those moments all of his life’s accomplishments mattered not in the least. What mattered was simply that he was there.

I found God’s presence and love to be very real for me in my son’s mere presence. I found that holy presence in my smiling, loving daughter who was there for me

throughout the day and during the evenings, and I found God in the love and patience of my devoted wife. I found that presence in the priests and lay eucharist ministers who brought the sacramental elements.

I found that presence in friends who were there for me, I found it in those who were praying for me, and I even found it in the get-well cards sent by those who couldn't visit.

Of course, this concept goes far beyond pastoral care to encompass the whole concept of Christian community itself. I think suffering requires more than just an awareness of community; I think it cries out for that **presence** of community that the sufferer can reach out and touch.

We shouldn't be too astounded by this spiritual need, --- for mere human presence is the holy foundation of God's own incarnation. God took on human form just to be with us.

When we suffer we find a need for both divine community and human community. **"I realize we believe in an unseen God that must be worshipped in faith,** but in the King James wording, God does send us the Holy Comforter. When the two meld together, that is divine community and human community, **when we can feel – (discern) the presence of God in the presence of others – then** we are greatly comforted. \*\*\*Let me repeat that sentence for it is the key to this sermon....\*After all, we are all created in the image of God.

Still "just showing up" sounds like such a cop-out when taken against the backdrop of our proud work ethic. Many of us are so caught up with the concepts of **production and performance** that we place very low value upon whom we are, absent that proficient self-propelled labor of ours. What we "**do**" can become more important us than "**who**" we are. Our production can become our idol, and ultimately "mere-presence" is left behind in the spiritual dust, as our life becomes one giant production machine lumbering awkwardly along toward eternity.

**Who you are is important to God. It is important to us. You are more valuable than your grandest accomplishment. It's who you are in Christ, not what you do //// that makes you a valued member of this Parish.** We sincerely appreciate all you do around here, but know this - **it's your physical presence with us that counts the most.** You were created in the image of God, and like Christ, your presence in the midst of our lives, brings us God's peace.