

The Rev. Mark Moline, Sermon

"From a Distance" 7/22/2018

God is watching us

God is watching us from a distance.

From a distance, the world looks blue and green And the snowcapped mountains white ---

From a distance, the ocean meets the stream And the eagle takes to flight

From a distance, there is harmony

And it echoes through the land. It's the voice of hope; it's the voice of peace ---

It's the voice of every man

God is watching us from a distance

I like that song. It was written by Julie Gold and made popular by Bette Midler a few years back. I like the tune. However, in my generation's very best vernacular, "I can only give it a "7." The tune is great, but it's difficult to dance to. We believers in Christ find it difficult to dance to the **theology** of a distant God.

A couple of weeks ago, our lectionary readings seemed to focus upon the mere presence of God - and that holy presence reflected in your presence. Remember, "Who you are in Christ is more important to the rest of us, than what you do. Today's readings seem to speak to us of the nearness - the closeness of that holy presence.

We read in today's Gospel of an up close and personal kind of God. Jesus is trying to grow closer to his twelve apostles. But they don't even have time for a quiet meal together. Jesus wants to take them away for a little R & R. --- But that would mean distancing himself from the needy and hurting crowds, and he won't do that.

I know there are times when it is more comfortable to think of God as distant. When things are going so well and I am busy doing my own thing, ---- really, I don't care to have God leaning over my shoulder watching every move I make? At times it does seem nice to imagine a God watching us from a safe and not-too-involved distance, perhaps - just kicked back in his big easy chair with his Holy Remote Control Device -- checking in once-in-a-while to see that all is going well with me, sort of channel surfing His creation.

*But then when I'm in some sort of trouble, I want him very close.

Holy scripture reveals a God who has always wanted to be close to His children. It all started with that unfortunate incident with the forbidden fruit. --- that's when we really had a distant God. Our heavenly parent pushed the kids out of the nest,

away from him - out of His Garden. But as with any loving parent, God couldn't put up with that distance for long, so the next thing we know is He has his children building him a tent in their neighborhood out there in the wilderness.

And then, as we read in today's first lesson - He starts to lay the groundwork for a more permanent home - a near-by temple. But wouldn't you know, that still wasn't close enough for God - He wanted to be even closer yet, so He became a man - He became one of us and stepped onto the stage of human history. However, that was really too close for our comfort - so we crucified him.

Even then He was not about to leave us home alone. His ascension cleared the path for Pentecost. ***Pentecost*** - that point in human history when our God really became **an** up close and a personal kind of God. That day God moved back in with us.

Christ was God made human. God made close. Jesus didn't distance himself from anyone, not the tax collectors, not the thieves, not the prostitutes, not the destitute, not the sick, not even the insane. He was close enough for that woman to reach out and touch the hem of His garment, he was close enough for small, noisy, dirty-faced, runny-nosed children to climb onto His lap and give him a hug.

The untouchables of his day - the dreaded lepers were absolutely forbidden by law from reaching out to touch anyone...but Jesus was just close enough to reach out and touch their rotting flesh. He was close enough for a sinful woman to drench his feet in her tears and he was close enough for Judas to kiss.

We worship - not some far away and distant God who sees a beautiful planet peopled by perfect beings living in harmony. Rather, We still worship that up close and personal God of the lepers. We worship a God who dwells among us here in this place - one who lives with us and in us and through us. One who (borrowing from Paul's words in today's second reading) still tells us, "You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

In closing, I must add though, that we can't reach him over the top of, around or behind the back of our spouses, our parents, our children, our friends, neighbors or even our enemies.

God is as close to you as the person seated next to you this morning. He is as close as our relationship with others and we reach out and touch the fringe of his cloak as we touch the lives of others with His love.