

Knowing the Presence

Acts 2: 22-28

K Karpen, Sunday, June 11, 2006

[Acts 2:22-28 "Knowing the Presence " K Karpen Sunday June 11, 2006]

Let's pray:

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. I can feel God's mighty power, and God's grace.

I can hear the brush of angels' wings. I see glory on each face;

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

Our Maytag washer broke down a week ago, in mid-cycle. Left with a load of soggy clothes, we called the Maytag repairman. Maybe they really are sitting around all day bored with nothing to do, like the commercials tell us. Even so, it took a few days to get him to our place. He was amazing. In seconds, he diagnosed the problem. In minutes he had fetched and replaced the errant part and presented us with the bill. Well, it wasn't cheap, but it was cheaper than a new washer.

Inspired, I turned on the dryer. It had been making evil clanking noises for weeks, and I thought maybe he could tell us if it needed to be replaced. Instantly he turned to me and said, "I can fix that for you."

I said, "Really?"

He said, "You need a new fan; I have one with me; it's a cheap part, you will just have to pay \$75 for a second service call.

I said, "What service call? You are already here!"

He looked at me with pity in his eyes, and said "You don't get something for nothing."

I said, "I know..."

He said, "You're a religious man, right?"

I said, "Maybe."

He said, "Let me tell you a story."

In the village I come from, there was a very spiritual woman who had grown old, so old she could no longer fetch groceries for herself, but her friends banded together to

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support her, and many days when she opened her door in the morning, a bag of groceries was waiting for her.

"The woman would lift up her hand," so said the Maytag man, and she would say, "Thank you God for giving me this food! God, you are great. Thank you, God that you did not forget me."

Well after days and days of this, her next door neighbor came over to her while she was in the midst of her prayer and she said, "Silly woman, there is no God. Your friends brought you those things this morning."

The holy woman went on praying, "Thank you, God," and the neighbor went home in disgust.

But a day came when the weather turned bad and no one came to bring food. And the neighbor said to herself, "I'd better go get some things and leave them for her, or the silly thing will go hungry."

So she did.

And the holy woman opened her door, found the groceries, and said, in a loud voice, "Thank you, God for giving me this food. Thank you, God. You are so great."

But, the neighbor couldn't stand it. She marched up and said, "Silly woman, there is no God and I can prove it." I, myself, bought you these groceries. See, I still have the receipt."

The holy woman stopped for a second then went on. "Thank you God, you are so great. You are greater than I thought. You brought me this food when I had nothing and you even got the devil to pay for it!"

The Maytag man looked at me and he grinned.

I said, "Good story. I still don't know why I should have to pay for another service call when you haven't left the room; but I will give you \$75 for the story."

"Thank you, God," he said. "You are so great."

We were sitting around Emily's place last Sunday with the youth, talking about the existence of God over a slice of pizza.

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They were going over the arguments for God, cosmological, theological, ontological; sharing which ones they found compelling and which they found less compelling.

I was in awe. They are very wise, our youth. But what I think we all came to, after a lot of talking and listening and pleasant arguing, is that there is a limit to what any intellectual argument for God can do for us.

Finally, God is about experience. God is about the relationship. If you haven't ever been aware of God's knowing you, it's hard to know God.

It reminds me of one of the first sermons I ever heard in this place, when I first came here as a student.

Rev. Skip George was preaching on the theme, "Either You Get it or You Don't."

And every few paragraphs of the sermon came the refrain, ".....either you get it or you don't."

Skip's young son Evan was in church. Evan was the only kid back then and there was no Sunday School. After the 4th or 5th refrain, either you get it or you don't, came a loud whisper, "I don't get it!"

It's tempting to think about God as either you get it or you don't. The apostle Peter, as he preaches boldly to the crowd in Jerusalem, seems to be saying just that.

"You are Israelites, listen to me; either you get it or you don't."

And he quotes from the Psalms,

The Lord is always in front of me as near as my own hand.

My heart is glad! My mouth rejoices. My whole body lives in hope!

You have made known to me the ways of life. You fill me with joy at your presence.

To know the presence of God, either you get it or you don't. Maybe. But the truth is, sometimes we get it and sometimes we don't. Sometimes I get it, and sometimes I'm with Evan.

"I don't get it!"

What really matters to me though, is that it gets us. What really matters to me, is that it gets me. The bottom line for me, whatever I'm going through, whatever my

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faith us like at the moment, comes the assurance that whatever I do or don't get, somehow, God gets me. God gets me – like nobody else. I'm not always sure what I really, really know about God. After 14 years of graduate theological education, I don't always know what I know about God. Sad. 22 years as a pastor. And I am not always so sure what exactly I know about God, what I have to say about God.

But this I know. Oh, yes, this I know. God knows me.

Many of you are familiar with 1st Corinthians 13. If you've been to enough weddings, you can probably say it by heart.

"If I speak in the tongues of people and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. Love is patient. Love is kind." Yes, sure, That is very beautiful and I hope that is the way love is in your life.

But we stop reading too soon. We stop reading before the good part.

"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, Paul writes. "Later we will see face to face. Now I know only a little, later I will know God fully, just as I have been fully known."

To know God as we are know by God. That is the hope and the promise. For now, I am grateful to be known by the creator of the universe. For now, I am content to be known by the one Jesus knew so well that he called him "father."

For now I am content to stand amazed and a little bewildered in the presence of God; to feel that presence and to be wrapped up in those everlasting arms.

God, whoever you get to bring the groceries, I stand and say Thank you, God! You are awesome! You are wonderful! You are great. I'll sing your praise. I'll sing hallelujah.

I will sing Hallelujah, I will sing, O Lord

I will sing Hallelujah, O Lord!

For you are the source of my supply,

Lord I praise. I lift you high.

Sing Hallelujah, O Lord.

(God's given me) God has given me the hills and the mountains

(God's given me) God has given me level plains

(God's given me) God has given me food and clothing

God's given me shelter from the storm and the rain.