

B PENT 20 10-7-2018  
Where to Find God!  
Malachi 3:6-10 James 4:1-10 Matthew 7:7-11

We live in an age in which many people are reconnecting after decades. Social media has made it so much easier to find people with whom you may have lost contact decades ago. Kay and I have both had that experience where we have received a friend request on Facebook from someone out of our distant past, a former pupil or parishioner, classmate or even relative. If you want and you are willing to spend a few dollars, you can track down people from your past using electronic services that search through massive databases to find just the person you are looking for. Interestingly, with most of these you have to check a use agreement saying that you will not use the information for anything nefarious like stalking or harassing. And if you are into genealogy you can even track your own DNA! There have been a few high profile cold cases solved by law enforcement using crime scene DNA to locate close relatives of unknown suspects.

But for many of us, the most important relationship of all, remains, at best long distance, and at worst, non-existent. I'm referring to our relationship with God. Finding God should, on the face of it, be a cinch, right? I mean God is everywhere all the time so why does it so often seem that God is absent or far away? The old cliché is true, if a bit too pat, "If God seems distant, guess who moved!"

Kay and her siblings got their 90 year-old mom an i-Pad and internet connection. They thought it would be fun Edie to see her grandkids and great grandkids postings on Facebook. You know, keep up with their activities and see the cute baby pictures. Well, it didn't work out that way. Edie, who had never owned a computer, found the technology confusing and intimidating. It proved to be a lot easier to show her pictures whenever one of her children visits than for her to try and use the i-Pad herself. Now Edie is 94 and if she doesn't want to learn a new technology no one should berate her for it. But staying caught up with the grandchildren and staying connected to God are two very different things. And the means that God has given us to stay connected with the Divine Presence is not complicated at all. Frankly, there is not an excuse you or I can think up that God is going to buy!

I knew a man who believed in God and by all accounts was a "good" man. He didn't attend church. Didn't see the need for it. He felt he and God were on a good footing and he knew too many people who did attend church for whom he had no respect. I was by his side the night he died and I heard his dying words, "What will become of me?" The question came too late for there to be any chance of giving this man an answer that would free him from the terror of death! I knew a couple that had been married over 65 years and were faithful attendees to church. She came down with a terminal illness and he carried on as though death was not inevitable. Whenever I came to visit he wanted prayers for her healing. When she did die, he felt betrayed by God, as though God had somehow let him down or failed to keep God's promise. What became painfully obvious was that his relationship with God, though consistent, was too shallow to sustain him through the valley of the shadow of death. God was more a talisman used to ward off evil spirits than a deep relationship of love and trust.

I have never seen a period in our history where more people were fearful, and that fear seems all the more fearful when it resides in the hearts of those who claim to be followers of the Christ, he who triumphed over death itself. Fear is a lack of trust and specifically a lack of trust in and love for God. In First John chapter 4, John tells us, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the Day of Judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love."

These words are sort of the flip side of the passage that was read from the Epistle of James this morning. James tells us that we do not have because we do not ask and we do not receive because we ask wrongly. The love and devotion we should be giving to God, we give to the world and so James calls us adulterers. He admonishes us to resist the devil and he will flee from us! And how do we resist the devil, resist the world, by drawing near to God.

Grace is all around us at every moment, but most of the time we miss it because we have not put ourselves in a position to experience it. There are many circumstances in which we can experience God's presence and grace, but there are some specifically ordained by God for that very purpose. From now until Thanksgiving I am challenging you to adopt these means into your everyday existence. And by so doing, to experience for yourself God's presence and love in your life in a new and fresh way.

Here is what I am asking you to do:

1. Pick a specific time and devote a few minutes to prayer, everyday. If you do not yet belong, join the prayer chain. Contact the office with your email or phone number.
2. Begin with the Gospel of Matthew or the Gospel of John and read a chapter a day.
3. Do your very best to attend worship every Sunday through Thanksgiving.
4. Join one of our 6-week study groups "Five Means of Grace."
5. On every Wednesday and Friday make a fast. This may include any of the following:  
A full fast, not eating any thing that day.  
Not eating until after 3 PM.  
Skipping one meal.  
Not eating anything between meals.  
Not eating or drinking anything with caffeine.  
Not eating or drinking anything with sugar.  
Eliminating something you normally consume every day.

The point is to deny yourself something so you are aware of the deprivation and then praying for those who are without food.

6. Tithe for the period between now and Thanksgiving by one of the following:  
Giving 10% of your income, as you define it, for the 6 weeks.

Increasing what you normally give by a specific percentage.

Begin giving a set amount each week.

Give an amount equal to what you would have spent on a meal, beverage, or snack that you denied yourself by fasting.

Ask and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Anything less is tantamount to stealing from God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.