

“WHERE IS GOD?”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24

Prayer: Holy Father, on this Labor Day weekend there is important work to be done. The task at hand is to rightly divide and understand and apply your Word. By your Spirit's presence and power give us wisdom and grace and much fruit for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction.

Over the past months we have talked a lot about 2020 and not without good reason. 2020 looms large in all of our minds. 2020 has made 2019 seem like five years ago. 2020 is taking a toll on all of us, on all of our souls.

Never have the words of Thomas Paine been more true, “These are times that try men's souls.” They certainly have tried mine over and over.

Let me identify one reason among many why this is true. We are aware of the attribute of God called omnipresence, that attribute that teaches us God is everywhere. Theologians call this one of the incommunicable attributes of God. That means one of the attributes God does not share with us. Love is one of His communicable attributes, being able to be everywhere is not one.

But we live in a world where it is feeling like we are getting closer to being like God in being able to be everywhere and it is taking a toll on our souls. Let me explain.

We are in a Tower of Babel type of world. We have built a technological tower so great, so far reaching that it has created a sense of our being omnipresent to everything in our world.

Google cameras and satellites have mapped and recorded just about every square inch of this planet allowing us to be present everywhere and see everything God sees.

Facebook is everywhere, recording every idle thought. Judging from all the selfies it's in every bedroom and bathroom and social gathering. What they miss Instagram and Twitter pick up.

NSA (National Security Agency) wants to be everywhere and know everything, listening to everyone, reading everyone's e-mail.

Think about it. Basically up until less than a hundred years ago, all we knew was what was happening just in our neck of the woods. Now we have ringside seats to every tragedy as it is happening, whether it is Portland or Kenosha, Hong Kong or Beirut. The 24/7 news feeds take us everywhere. We can be present to everything that is happening anywhere in the world.

But this false sense of omnipresence is hurting our souls. We weren't created to be able to handle all the pain, evil, suffering and tragedy, and especially as it assaults us from so many directions day after day, week after week, month after month. It is overwhelming.

Only "God, who is omnipresent, can handle all that evil, pain, and tragedy. He's capable. He has the emotional and psychological bandwidth to witness his creation repeatedly commit evil and not become overwhelmed. Finite humans, though, are not God. We don't have the capacity to handle inordinate amounts of evil. This faux omnipresence hurts us" (Alan Shlemon).

Let's talk about who really is everywhere and who can handle it and in fact is in control of everywhere He is. Let this truth be your comfort and peace and rest. In other words, don't let this knowledge be just theoretical or theological, let it be personal and refreshing and cause for worship.

With regard to knowledge, we know God is *omniscient*, He knows everything and His knowledge is infallible. With regard to power, we know God is *omnipotent*, He can do anything He wills to do.

When we think of God as infinite with regard to space, we call that *omnipresence*. Space is a part of creation. God is Lord of space and cannot be limited by space. He is close to and next to everything. He inhabits the universe.

How big is God?

This is a favorite mental exercise of children. We usually answer bigger than our world, bigger than the whole universe. But to be accurate we shouldn't say God is big or small, God has no size or shape, God is not bigger than the universe. God is spirit, He is immaterial. God doesn't have definable boundaries or limitations, He can't be measured or quantified.

Solomon in his prayer to dedicate the new temple says:

I Kings 8:27 Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!

Where is God? In heaven or everywhere?

We have material bodies so we are here and not there. As much as mothers would like to be in two places at once, we don't have the gift of bi-presence. Angels are spirits, not having physical bodies, and like all created things, they can only be in one place at one time.

God is present everywhere in all creation. God's omnipresence is beautifully and poetically described in *Psalm 139*.

David starts with the womb, that God is present with us from our very beginning. And that never changes. There is nowhere in the entire universe where God is not present.

If I go up to heaven you are there, if I descend to the depth of the grave you are there.
If I go to the top of Mt. Everest or the bottom of the Mariana Trench, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning, if I travel at the speed of light, I cannot escape God's eye.
And if all that fails, surely darkness will cover me, yet even darkness is like light to God.

Some think of God as only being up there in heaven somewhere, out of sight, out of mind. Heaven is His throne and the earth is His footstool, He inhabits it all. God is present in every square inch of space.

How fully present is God everywhere?

Jeremiah 23:23-24 Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? 24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.

“Do I not fill heaven and earth?” God Himself is present at every point of space with His whole and entire being. All of God is fully present right here and right now. God Himself is here.

His love, wrath, mercy, justice, knowledge, and so on, are fully present everywhere in creation and beyond.

The full presence of God everywhere all the time gave the prophets of God license to mock false prophets and idols. Remember Elijah on Mt. Carmel mocking the prophets of the false god and idol Baal.

I Kings 18:27 Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”

There is no God like the God of the Bible. How incredible and incomprehensible is our God; how glorious and majestic. Who can fathom the greatness of our God? Heaven is His throne and the earth is His footstool. Light years are nothing to God. Trillions of miles completely

unnoticed. He inhabits a hundred billion galaxies and every square inch of our planet, next to me and next to you.

Practical implications and Application.

What does it mean for us to be in the presence of God in 2020, to live our lives in His presence, the one before all hearts are open and all thoughts are known?

Hebrews 4:13 No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

We should think about this truth until it sinks in deep enough to make a difference in our lives. Moses stood in the presence of God as a consuming fire and it changed his life forever.

Psalm 139 is David's meditation on God's omnipresence. He finds comfort in the nearness and presence of God, that no matter where he goes, God is there. God is always where he is.

God's presence has two effects on us, it is cause to tremble, and cause to be comforted, it starts with misery and leads to mercy. Since we can't hide from God, our only hope is to hide in God.

God's presence as a convicting presence.

We all know the experience of trying to hide something. Parents know that strange silence in the house that means someone is up to no good.

We all know the experience of trying to keep something from others, cover up, be unnoticed, that furtive glance over the shoulder. We know when we want to keep secret sin secret.

We work so hard to keep our sins from each other, but think nothing of God seeing and knowing all of them. ***Strange how we fear man more than God.***

Some of you are hiding secret sins, some of your families are suffering from those sins. Turn from your anger and bitterness, from your criticizing and complaining. Turn from your abusive words and actions, for your sexual immorality and infidelity. Turn to the God who is right there next to you.

Of all the places God dwells, where does He most delight to dwell? In the heart of a broken and contrite sinner, in the heart of one humbled and turned toward Him.

As parents Phama and I prayed countless times as our sons were growing up that when they sinned they would be caught and caught quickly. We were amazed at how many times God answered that prayer (and so were they). But we should all pray that prayer for ourselves if we have our soul's best interest at heart.

It is the kindness and grace of God when we are caught and repent. Remember how David said his secret sin was eating him up inside, how he was wasting away and groaning under the heavy hand of God until he acknowledged his sin (Psalm 32:3-7).

David was honest about his sin when he said to God, “Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:4).

Oh that we would fear God and be quick to repent. Plead with God for deliverance, find a confessor, repent, change your heart and your ways. Oh that a personal knowledge of God’s presence would give us a holy fear of God.

Ask God to search out our thoughts and motives, our intentions and actions, so that there can be repentance and change, a clearing of our accounts and records, that we might stand before God acquitted and justified.

God’s presence is a practical comforting presence.

God’s presence makes our world personal, not impersonal. God is here. He is intimate with each one of us. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves, closer than our thoughts and skin.

To Isaac God said, “I will be with you and will bless you” (Genesis 26:3).

God told Moses He would be with his mouth and teach him what to say.

To Isaiah God said, “Fear not, for I am with you; ... I will strengthen you, I will help you” (Isaiah 41:10).

To Jeremiah God said, “I am with you to save you and deliver you” (Jeremiah 15:20).

Jesus tells us He will be with us even to the very end, and enable us to make disciples.

God is with us to enable us to resist temptations, He is nearer to us than Satan.

God is with us to enable us to endure afflictions, even when all around us abandon us.

God is with us to enable us to do whatever hard thing He lays on us to do in His perfect providence. His presence is our strength.

God is fully present to your every need and circumstance and situation and trial and difficulty. He is with us when we are mucking out stalls, changing diapers, doing paperwork, solving problems, working from home. God cannot be absent or ignorant of where you are and what is going on. God cannot be present and passive, He is present and active, powerfully working all things for His glory and our benefit and blessing. “In Him we live and move and have our being.”

Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

God is a very present help in time of trouble (Psalm 46:1). He is never far from any of us (Acts 17:27).

God is not just with believers, God is for believers, on the side of believers. "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31).

I have said before, when God seems most absent to you, that is when He is actually most present. The cross proves this. To Jesus on the cross God seemed most utterly absent, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yet there Jesus also said, "into your hands I commit my Spirit." God was more present on the cross than anywhere else in the universe, because it was there God poured out His greatest blessings.

Let us make our consciousness of God's presence with us a way of life. Let us practice the presence of God in our daily home life, in our conversations, in our decisions, in school issues, in our check book, in our work and worship. Practice the presence of God in our fears about Covid or the future, of the next news worthy disaster. Ask for a deeper sense of the fullness of the presence of God. Be aware of the spiritual presence of Christ as we leave here and go out to relate, interact, serve, give, love. He cannot be more with us than He always already is.

To cope with 2020, press into God's presence with us.

Unplug, disconnect, turn off, silence the voices, step back.

Go outside, get in nature, see the grandeur, splendor, greatness of God.

Pray, find your peace and hope and help in Him, in His nearness, His presence.

Worship Him. Let this unburden our weary souls.

"To the everywhere present God we may safely yield ourselves in all our lives, saying, "Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way!" For no matter where our way may take us, "Even there shall His hand lead us, and His right hand shall hold us" (Monergism).

Prayer:

Holy Father, you are omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, all knowing, all powerful and ever present. When we use words like that it can make you sound like a theory, like some great untouchable, unreachable distant being. But actually these words make you intimate, present, with us, for us.

No matter where we go or what we do, you are there. You never leave us or forsake us. From before our birth, through every second of our lives, to our last breath, you are with us and for us. Let this truth sink in deep and create trust and peace in you. "In your presence is fullness of joy." In the name of Jesus, Amen.