

2022.04.24 - Presence - Fullness

So What? God offers his presence to us for deeper connection.

Feel What? Peaceful

Now What? Take moments throughout your day to welcome the presence of God's Spirit.

VISION CASTING

The purpose of Tallgrass at The Well is to create community together by inviting everyone into the Way of Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

Story about going to Yellowstone National Park.



Where does this feeling come from? What explanation do we have for experiences like this?

One of the views people have about our world is called exclusive rationality. It's the assumption that only what is quantifiable and provable is true. Tim Keller says this:

Timothy Keller, Making Sense Of God: “Exclusive rationality is the belief that science is the only arbiter of what is real and factual and that we should not believe anything unless we can prove it decisively using empirical observation. The things that we can prove are the only things worthy of being called ‘truth.’ Everything else one might say or think lies in the realm of unreliable human feeling and opinion.”

So secular thought doesn't have in and of itself the tools to explain concepts that are universal to the human experience such as the drive for meaning and purpose, defining what goodness is, and the appreciation of beauty.

Philosopher Charles Taylor describes this state of being as living from an immanent frame. There has been a disenchantment of our world, where once, maybe, people believed in magic and fairies and dragons but now, through intellectual advancement and the scientific method, we know better than our forbears. This isn't to say that secular adults in our world don't experience transcendent moments that catch them up in a moment of awe. But they do so in spite of their worldview, not because of it.

Timothy Keller, Making Sense Of God: “Sometimes one experiences a fullness in which the world suddenly seems charged with meaning, coherence, and beauty that break in through our ordinary sense of being in the world. Some who experience this know unavoidably that there is infinitely more to life than just physical health, wealth, and freedom. There is a depth and wonder and some kind of Presence above and beyond ordinary life. It may make us feel quite small and even unimportant before it, and yet also hope filled and unworried about the things that usually make us anxious.”

For the Christian, the world is filled with possibility and the in-breaking of God. Instead of stamping out desire and longing, we pay attention to them, yes, submitting them to the greater goodness of our purpose and design. We pay attention to what our desires are saying, in hope of knowing that God will satisfy them in him.

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity: “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”

And here's why I challenge the secular narrative so often: The world around us tells us that we're only animals, prone to express our base nature. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," is the refrain. All that there is is the here and now. But then, we're so offended when we actually act towards each other as if there's no final consequences for our actions, and morality is all about social conditioning.

"No!" the Scriptures proclaim. You were made for more than this. You were made for the transcendent. You are not just a glob of cells conditioned to act a certain way for selfish benefits. You're made in the image of God to stand in awe of truth, beauty, and goodness because he created everything as an expression of his glory and his love.

Transition: And the Genesis narrative says as much.

SOLUTION

In the beginning, the earth was formless and empty. Over the first five days of creation, God spoke and our world exploded with light and life, color and sounds. And, then on the sixth day, he created us:

Genesis 1:27-31 (NIV): So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food. " And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning —the sixth day.

Scripture is interested in Adam and Eve as archetypes—they are human beings who represent to us what God means for all of us.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15 (NIV): Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ... The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Adam was created in the untamed wilderness and placed in the Garden—a place of perfect peace, harmony, and tranquility. Eve was then created from Adam, and through their partnership, God gave them a mandate: To be fruitful and multiply. Notice these are two different dimensions of the mandate:

- To have them multiply means for them to have offspring that fills the earth.
- To have them bear fruit means for them to subdue the wilderness and take the conditions of the garden and push its boundaries outward until it covers the earth. As they are fruitful and they multiply, there will be cities, nations, and societies that reflect the culture of Eden—which really is heaven on earth. They were to tend the garden while facing the problems of the untamed wilderness until heaven's presence was manifest world wide. Part of this mandate is to terraform the land so literally everywhere becomes heaven on earth and the glory of the Lord fills it all.

John Walton, *The Lost World Of Adam And Eve*: “When we consider the Garden of Eden in its ancient context, we find that it is more sacred space than green space. It is the center of order, not perfection, and its significance has more to do with divine presence than human paradise. In the textual description, it features rivers that bring fertility and an arboretum of sorts. This parklike environment is well known in the ancient world. The motif of flowing rivers (four is common) is connected to sacred space early and often. ... Gardens were constructed adjoining sacred space as evidence of the fertility that resulted from the presence of God. They were not vegetable gardens or fields of crops; they were beautifully landscaped parks. They provided fruit that was offered to the god. Kings also built gardens adjoining their own palaces where they would receive (and impress) visitors. Thus, the text of Genesis can be seen to describe a garden, a park landscaped with exotic trees and stocked with wildlife. These were common accoutrements to temples and palaces in the ancient world.”

In Eden, we see the original design for the connection between God and humanity: There would be divine order filled with divine presence welcoming us to relate to God face-to-face. In Eden, we are not visitors to impress, but co-participants of that ordering, fueled by mutual delight.

Again, the partnership was to make all of the earth like Eden, but sin disrupted this plan. Israel was later formed as a worshiping nation, and at its center was the new focus of God's presence in the Jerusalem temple. Yet, Israel failed on her mission to be a blessing to the nations. But Jesus' death opened the way for God's Spirit to dwell on

earth again, but in a significant plot twist. God's presence wouldn't be housed in a box in a building, but in each of his followers. And his presence in us reorders everything from inside and pushed outward.

Redemption restores our original design where we partner with God to cultivate Eden in the spheres where we find ourselves. As we become renewed and reordered, the places where God are also affected significantly.

Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*: “Redemption is not just about being saved *from* the consequences of sin, it is also about being saved *to* something—to resume the task for which we were originally created. And what was that task? In Genesis, God gives what we might call the first job description: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’ ‘Be fruitful and multiply’, means to develop the social world: build families, churches, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, ‘subdue the earth’ means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, compose music. This passage is sometimes called the ‘cultural mandate’ because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures and build civilizations—nothing less.”

In the OT, God's presence was concentrated in one place, and his power visiting specific people for specific tasks. In the NT, his presence lives in each of us and his power rests upon each of us as we live into his kingdom.

Transition: Let's talk now of a few distinctives we came make when it comes to understanding God's presence.

APPLICATION

First, Christian doctrine declares that God is omnipresence—God is everywhere. There is no place in all of creation God cannot be found. King David in the Psalms even declared that if he made his bed in Sheol, God would certainly be there. So, we know that God is in all and through all.

Yet, there are times we see God manifest himself in unprecedeted ways. When Solomon dedicated the First Temple, God showed up:

2 Chronicles 7:1-2 (NIV): When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it.

It may be that we sometimes feel it's appropriate to say, "Thank you for your presence," or "Send your presence," and even, "Make me aware of your presence." These are equally true statements.

Why do we want presence?

- The **JOY** that it brings: Many of us are looking for relief in a chronically anxious age
 - **Psalm 16:11 (NKJV): You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**
- The **FRIENDSHIP** that is cultivated: Genesis 1 and 2 teach us that we were made for relationship with God. And if we don't get that need met, we'll look to fill it with other things. Fortunately, God has sent his Spirit, not as an impersonal force, but as the Spirit of connection and friendship.
 - **2 Corinthians 13:14 (NIV): May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**

How do we practically prioritize God's presence?

- Use time and attention **INTENTIONALLY**: We cannot seek God's presence on the run. To cultivate an awareness of the presence, we will need to reorient our schedules by changing how we spend our time and attention.
- Exercise **PATIENCE**: This all takes time. And in a microwaved world, we may be surprised that we can't push a button and—presto—the bell dings and God shows up. Building a friendship takes time and consistency.
 - **My story of setting aside time to be in God's presence.**

Transition: You may be thinking about how this might not be for you, and I want you to know that there's space here to figure things out.

OBJECTIONS

You might think that God's presence is more for Christians who have it together and who are super special and super spiritual. And that's not you, so you're going to have to watch from the sidelines.

Or, you might worry that we're going to become *that kind of church* that's all into the mystical and super weird and detached from normal stuff like feeding the pets and doing your taxes. Someone around here has to be practical and concrete, so

What I would ask is that you come back with an open mind and a seeking heart.

Transition: You just never know where God might show up and do something significant.

INSPIRATION

Blaise Pascal is probably best known as a mathematician, inventor, and philosopher. But he was also a devout follower of Jesus. At his death, a note was found stitched into his jacket that recalled a profound moment of encounter that marked him for the rest of his life.

Blaise Pascal: “**The year of grace 1654, Monday, 23 November.... From about half past ten at night until about half past midnight, FIRE. GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob not of the philosophers and of the learned. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace. GOD of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Your GOD will be my God. Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except GOD. He is only found by the ways taught in the Gospel. Grandeur of the human soul. Righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.”**

Transition: No one can promise you this kind of God moment. But what we can do is take steps to open ourselves up to more of God's presence.

CONCLUSION

Next Step:

- Take moments throughout your day to welcome the presence of God's Spirit.

Prayer

Invitation