
Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ

God's Abundant Presence

A Sermon by

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Scripture: John 6:1-14

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There are moments in our lives when God's abundant presence is palpable, yet hard to grasp fully.

It was somewhere back in the mid to late 1990s the girls Nancy and I, had just moved from Poughkeepsie, New York, to Kalamazoo, Michigan. As frequently happened Nancy was out at a meeting and I was home putting the girls to bed. I had just read our nightly quotient of books, we had said our prayers, each girl had that last drink, and were settling in for sleep. As was my custom, I went upstairs to our study to read when I heard Jess call, "Daddy." I dashed down stairs. Jess rarely called me after our nightly ritual and there she was sitting up in her new top bunk-style bed the kind with a desk underneath.

"Daddy When I die will I see Grandpa Nelson again?"

I said something like, "Yes, I believe so.

"Will he know me? I'm sort' a already forgetting what he looks like?"

(Earlier we had gotten a pencil and ruler out and marked fresh lines on the cellar door trim Jess as usual had grown a lot. We had talked about how much she was growing up how much she had changed)

"What do you think will help him know you?"

"God?"

"I suppose but maybe even more than that your love for him.

"I do love him and I keep him in my "blesses" "Bless Grandpa and Grandma

"I know you are a good girl. Remember how you and Grandpa used to go fishing together how you used to sit in his lap and talk How you'd stroke his stubbly whiskers. How he smelled of pipe tobacco?"

"Yeah.

"I believe that it is in these simple acts of love received and given that we are forever marked we are indelibly marked like the art work you brought home from school and is hanging on the refrigerator where you pressed those stamps down on the colored paper leaving a permanent mark. Love marks us like mommies lipstick kisses leave just such a permanent marks on both the person that shared the love and the one who received it.

"Grandpa kissed me and I kissed him. He told me he loved me and I know I told him. So you think someday we will see each other again.

"Sure. I would not be surprised with all the love you and Grandpa shared that Grandpa is watching over you right now from heaven.

"You think so?"

"I do. I think love connects us even when we can't see or touch each other Just like you know Mommy will be home later tonight and come in and give you a kiss even after you are asleep. You may not wake up remembering it but you know the kiss will be there.

"Ok. I'm tired now.

"Good night big girl.

"Good night Daddy.

Dismissed I walked away again amazed at what goes on that I never seem quite able to grasp.

In all circumstances, whether at times of hunger, or in times of raging storms Jesus is there for us God's abundant presence God's incarnate LOVE will sustains and protect us food, faith, grace, salvation. We are called **to respond** to God's **activity** respond to the sign presence of God in our

lives to quiet our fears with loving presence helping us to learn how to “pass it forward” continuing to extend God’s abundant presence through acts of unconditional giving to others.

Have you ever attended an organization where members begin by describing why they attached strings to their generosity It makes sense when they tell you each little detail of the infractions church leaders have made causing them to be untrustworthy. As you listen you wonder if the church leaders are stupid, or corrupt, or inept At least compared to the wise and righteous generous people telling why they don’t have time to serve themselves. So when they do find extra money to give so generously it is obvious they should put their wise strings on it so that it is not wasted.

It is hard to grasp the feeding of the 5,000 without wondering how Jesus feed so many with so little It almost makes you wonder was it magic Did Jesus just reach into the fabric of our Material reality and pull out food from some parallel universe like a magician pulling a rabbit from a hat Or was it something else. Was it somehow a lesson we might be blessed to grasp today Could those people have begun to trust Jesus so much that even when they had to dig into their own essential supplies resources that together they would have enough and that in letting go of who they might have shared with freely in putting it into the common basket releasing control and trusting together there was more than enough And Miracle of Miracles in their letting Go and trusting letting go and loving without condition They grew richer in what they had accomplished together.

Today, Pastor Nancy and many others of our congregation are unconditionally giving their lives away to people they do not yet know. Actually, in their giving away of themselves from their stores of service acquired in relationship with Church of the Beatitudes of faith, hope and love Neither they nor we will not be diminished made less And in fact we will find that instead we will be strengthened, renewed and restored.

Hording controlling putting conditions on our generosity often COSTS far greater than we could ever imagine. It is the breeding ground of fear the opposite of love is often not hate but instead FEAR. When we become afraid we often become slow to respond slow to trust slow to believe there is any Good News possible. We are super sensitive to any little slight reducing our generosity of and love. This is the breeding ground where evil can eat us from the inside until at last we pray for death ...

Do you expect a kiss, a hug, a smile, an unconditional taste of the bread of life? These are the indelible marks of a loving God symbols of things yet to come.