

Sunday, July 25, 2021

## May I come in...to the Living Room?

(Message 7; Series: *My Heart, Christ's Home*)

(John 15:1-8)

### Scripture:

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.*

*Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

*<sup>5</sup>"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

### Message:

**An elderly couple, flying first class, were sitting behind a businessman who was increasingly frustrated with them.**

They had been ahead of him in line at the gate, and again while boarding the plane. They moved slowly; he was in a hurry. When the meal was served, they delayed the businessman again by having to get some pills from the overhead storage and inadvertently dropped a battered duffel bag into the aisle: "What's the matter with you people?" he exploded, loud enough for the entire cabin to hear. "I'm amazed you ever get anywhere! Why can't you just stay home!"

To further register his anger, the man sat down and reclined his seat back as hard as he could - so hard the elderly gentlemen's tray of food spilled all over him and his wife. The flight attendant apologized profusely to the couple: "Is there anything we can do?" she asked. The husband explained it was their sixtieth wedding anniversary and they were flying for the first time. "Let me at least bring you a bottle of wine," the flight attendant offered. And she did.

When it was uncorked, the elderly gentlemen stood up, proposed a toast - and then, poured the entire bottle of wine over the head of the impatient

businessman sitting in front of him. Everyone in the cabin cheered! Hurried people are neither loving nor lovable.

**Robert Munger, in *My Heart, Christ's Home*, pictures Jesus asking to come in and check out the rooms of our heart: nursery, study, dining room, workroom, bedroom...** Today Jesus asks to come into our **living room** - a quiet, comfortable room with a fireplace, a couple of overstuffed chairs, a bookcase, and a rather intimate atmosphere.

Upon entering, Jesus seems delighted with what he sees: *"Let's come here often. It is secluded and quiet; we can have good talks and fellowship here in this room. I'll be here every morning,"* he said. *"Meet me here and we can start the day together."*

Munger writes, *"Morning after morning, I'd go to the living room. He'd often take a book of the Bible from the bookcase, open it, and we'd read it together; those times were wonderful; he'd talk to me, I'd respond. Our friendship deepened."*

*"But little by little, under the pressure of many responsibilities, this time shortened, until it all but disappeared. I became too busy to spend my precious time to be with Christ. It wasn't a deliberate decision, just an inevitable one..."*

*"One morning, as I ran past the doorway to the living room on my way to a meeting, I noticed the fire in the fireplace...and Jesus sitting there...just as he promised..."*

**A couple weeks ago we talked about being a three-chair church; today, we'll talk about a two-chair personal relationship with Jesus.**

## **OUR SOUL**

**If you've read the Bible, you know God created our **soul to search for Him**.** The Psalmist is especially obsessed with this thought:

*"You God are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you" (Psalm 63:1)*

*"My soul thirsts for you like a parched land thirsts for water" (Psalm 143:6)*

The Psalmist suggests he lifts us up (**Psalm 145:14**), forgives our sins and heals our diseases (**Psalm 103:3**); as a result, we cling to him (**Psalm 63:8**) and our soul finds rest in him (**Psalm 62:1**).

Because it is desperate to be whole, our soul is God-smitten, God-crazed and God-obsessed. The soul seeks God with its whole being.

Our mind may be obsessed with idols, our will may be enslaved to habits, our body may be consumed with its appetites, but our soul will never rest until it rests in God.

**In the beginning when God created the world, he built an amazing living room - a quiet, intimate setting best described in Genesis as a “garden.”**

The Bible tells us it was the perfect home for Adam and Eve; the perfect place for God to (just) be “with” them. That garden God created represents his great desire to be “with us” - like the Living Room of our heart. For the soul to be well, it needs time to be with God – that’s how he created it.

There is an interesting phrase in **Genesis 3:8** - “*Then [Adam] and [Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...*” Since God is a Spirit, what does it sound like when God goes for a walk?

The key word here is the word, “walking.” “Walking” is something you do with someone you care about: a friend with a friend, a child with a parent, two people in love. It’s not really about the walk; it’s about being together.

The God of the Bible is a God who wants to be “with us” so much he made our souls for walking, for being together, for just being “with.”

**But since we’ve sinned, we prefer to hide from God among the trees, or stay out the “living room.”** But God will not be denied. So God actually pursues us; the entire Scripture is about God going after, relentlessly pursuing, us just to be “with us.”

God calls out, “**Where** are you?” (God knew exactly where they were). But God is saying, “*I told you I would be here every morning to meet with you.*” God is asking, “*Where are you in relationship to me?*”

## OUR HISTORY

**Remember Enoch? We know very little about Enoch except that he “walked with God.”** Noah walked with God, so did Abraham, his son Isaac, and his other son, Ishmael. God was with Jacob - the master manipulator - and then the whole nation of Israel.

God was with Joseph (and here is where “with God” starts to get interesting). Joseph runs into a hard stretch in life, and we are told “*the Lord was with Joseph*” in slavery and even in prison. God doesn’t want to be with us just in the garden or living room, he wants to be with us everywhere and always - in the painful and difficult places of life as well.

God was with Moses, Gideon, Samuel, Ruth, David and many others until a baby is born that an angel said was to be called, Immanuel (meaning, “*God with us!*”).

Jesus gives us a clear glimpse of what a “being-with-God-life” is all about. Days before his death, Jesus made this amazing statement: “*I am the vine, you*

*are the branches. If you will be with me as I am with you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:3-4)*

Bearing fruit means “doing” wonderful things for God and his kingdom. The primary “doing” is “being” “with God” - i.e., abiding in the vine. If we don’t “abide” (i.e., be “with God”) our life won’t amount to much.

Jesus initiated his grand plan when he appointed twelve **disciples** so “*they might be with him*” (cf. **Mark 3:14**) - and they transformed the world. After ascending back into heaven, Jesus sent his Spirit to be “with them” and called an Acts 2 **Comm-unity** to be with Him -which we know as His Church.

This Church, Luke tells us, was devoted to being “with” Jesus through their devotion to the Word (teaching), prayer, fellowship, and breaking bread together.

**Centuries ago, a man named Nicolas Herman became a Christian by looking at a tree.** It was winter; the tree was barren; but Nicolas knew in spring it would grow leaves. It struck him that if God did that for trees, he would surely do it for a person.

So when his military career was ended by injury, he found a job in a local monastery as a dishwasher and cobbler - and devoted his life to being with God.

He is better known as Brother Lawrence; after his death some of his letters were compiled into a book entitled, *Practicing the Presence of God* (it is downloaded for free).

Today it is considered the most read book after the Bible (amazing, from a dishwasher and a cobbler). When a person is “with God,” it doesn't matter if you're a king or a dishwasher; a person's soul thrives, not from their accomplishments, but from simply *being with God*.

**Now it is our turn. How do we, living in our high tech, economically focused, fast-paced world with its constantly changing morality, find time to be with Jesus?**

How many moments of my day can I fill with a conscious **awareness** of his **presence**? How can I spend more time in the Living Room of my heart, in his presence, in prayer, in His Word?

Do I think about God at home, at work, in a meeting, in my car, when online, while watching the news, while conversing with others, when doing dishes?

Can I keep God in mind throughout my day - regardless of what I'm doing?

More often than I'd like to admit, I realize I often don't think about God for hours at a time - and I'm a minister, work at a church, and preach about him!

It is easy to feel hurried, swamped, impatient, frustrated, pre-occupied, pressured.

This is a **discipline**. It requires **intentionality**. God regularly asks...

*“Doug, over the next few hours, you can do life with me or without me; you can feel sorry for yourself or be thankful; you can think you’re in control or accept that I am actually running the universe. You decide. What’s it going to be, Doug?”*

I need to decide! (Sometimes minute by minute).

It doesn't make sense to try and do life **without God** - not even for a few minutes. Understand, “*life with God*” life doesn’t mean adding a lot of religious activities to your day. Doing life with God means being increasingly aware of God throughout our day, conversing continually with him, and turning over control of our agenda to His will. In exchange, we receive inner peace and a contented soul. By contrast, the “*life without God*” will starve one’s soul to death (literally!)

## THE ASSUMPTIONS

**When it comes being with God, there are three assumptions we should pursue:**

**(1<sup>st</sup>) God wants to make every moment of our life **glorious** with his presence.**

God doesn't just want to be “with us”; he wants to make our life “glorious.” *Glorious* is not a word we commonly use; but it accurately defines what being with God does to our soul; he wants to fill us with beauty, splendor, and wonder. It’s what people see when they say, “There’s something different about you than other people.”

This isn’t reserved for saints or super-spiritual people; God wants this for all of us.

Christians often focus on trying **not to sin** (that means they’re constantly thinking about **sin!**). God wants us to focus on him; to **practice** his **presence**, to be conscious of his presence during as many of the 86,400 seconds of each day as possible.

**Psalm 16:8** (ESV) - *“I have set the Lord always before me”*

Paul *“We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (**2 Cor.10:5**)

Notice that the words “set” and “take captive” are active verbs. This implies we have an active role. We think about God for a moment; then our *monkey mind* distracts us; we go from selflessness to self-centeredness in

milliseconds; from a sense of peace to waves of worry in the blink of an eye. But God continues to pursue us; he invites us back; he always has a seat reserved.

**(2<sup>nd</sup>) The best way to start doing life with God is in **small moments**.**

When I'm relaxed - on vacation, and standing in the mountains, sitting by a waterfall, or walking on the shore of a lake, it is fairly easy to be "with God."

I find it relatively easy to be "with God" at Maundy Thursday, Resurrection Sunday, and the Christmas services with the great hymns of reflection and praise. On those occasions, no one really has to remind me of God's presence.

But those moments don't really happen that often; every day isn't Easter. So we need to learn to deliberately look for God in the ordinary moments of life.

Munger suggests starting **every day** with a few moments together - *"morning after morning...listening to him through his Word and Spirit, speaking to him in prayer."*

It can be as simple as, *"Good morning, Lord! Thank you for this day; please be with me."*

It can be as simple as consciously visualizing him in the room; two-chairs facing each other; Jesus is already sitting in one of them and he invites you to sit in the other.

It can be as simple as using the traffic delays to reflect on Him; consciously reviewing our calendar with him looking over our shoulder; or consciously pausing a minute when moving from one activity to the next to acknowledge his presence.

(I'd love to say I got this mastered, but when I'm busy or stressed, I'm easily sidetracked).

Truth is, **hurry** is one of the major barriers, if not the major barrier, that keeps us from *"being with God."*

When considering the call to Willow Creek, John Ortberg says he asked Dallas Willard how his soul could survive in the busyness of a large church in a large city. Willard said, "Ruthlessly eliminate hurry!" Ortberg wrote it down. "What else?" Willard said, "There is nothing else!"

None of us are that important that we always need to hurry (plus hurry makes us more unloving and unlovable and might get us a wine shampoo).

And, once we learn to slow down, it feels good not to always be in a hurry, not to be controlled by our to-do list, to let others go in front of us, and to realize a bit of God is showing through us.

The recent pandemic forced people to slow down. Suddenly, people were staying home more and spending more time with their family. After some initial adjustments, people realized they enjoyed the slower pace of life. But sadly, with the lifting of the protocols, we've quickly embraced "hurry" again.

**(3<sup>rd</sup>) People will look different to us when we see them while we're being "with God."**

People are a huge part of life - we have to **live with them**, interact with them, get along with them. How well we do that depends largely on the health and well-being of our soul, and the well-being of our soul depends largely on our being "with God."

When we're "with God" we tend to see people more like **God** sees them; if we're conscious of God's **presence**, it impacts how we **respond** to them.

And when we see others as people God created and Jesus died for, we will engage them as Christ would (and did). And that will distinguish us from most others in their life. In **2 Cor. 5:16**, Paul says - "*From now on, regard no one from a worldly point of view.*"

Too often we see each other through the world's glasses; so we put on masks (not to protect us in a pandemic) but so people will see us as we want them to see us.

We greet each other: "How are you doing?" The typical response is, "Fine, and you?" Most of the time we're lying - we're not really fine at all; but we can't let anyone know because then what they will think about us?

If we were confident that people would see us and respond as God does, maybe we could be honest, "I'm really tired. I'm struggling financially; my wife and I are at odds; my son is twenty and doesn't know Jesus..."

Imagine how life (and His Church) would be different if we saw and responded to each other through **Christ's eyes** and with Christ's heart. It can only happen if we spend time with him.

**In the beginning, God created a perfect place in our soul where he could be with us - this is actually why he created us and why he sent his Son to die for us.**

But in our **busyness**, we walk on by - usually in a **hurry** to get on with our **agenda**. But even if we've ignored him for long periods at a time, he offers us repeated opportunities and multiple ways and impassioned invitations to come back...

The truth is, as St. Augustine famously stated in his *Confessions*, "*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.* We

must consciously and continuously ask ourselves, “Where is God in this moment?” and seek to join him there.

Don’t let Christ **wait alone** in the living room of your heart; accept his **invitation**, go in and sit with him, and your soul will find rest in him.

**Prayer (Sing) “Into my Heart”**

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