

Lent V  
March 18, 2018

### To Be With, Always

Recently, I was fortunate enough to be with my good friend Lindsay just after she received notification she got into the MBA program she wanted. It was a joy to celebrate with her and share in this moment she had hoped for for some time. It was an exciting moment and I was with her when she called those closest to her, and was with her long enough that day to begin to see the news settle in. I was grateful to be with her and--I really got to experience the celebration with her.

To me, these shared moments are some of the most powerful which make the presence of goodness and beauty undeniable. It makes a difference to really be with someone in their celebration. Of course, we cannot be with everyone at every moment in their life—I end up sending cards to many friends—with my greetings of congratulations, or happy birthday. It would be lovely to be with them at more moments of celebration but we have limits. Regardless, the gift of being with someone at these happy moments is obvious and I pray you too know what it is like to be with someone who is in celebration, who is grateful for something they received, who is experiencing a joy in their life. I hope to experience many more moments like Lindsay's.

Sam Wells, an English theologian and vicar of St Martin's in the Field London (you may know about their choir) speaks about the importance of being *with* someone.<sup>1</sup>

We are good today, he posits, at doing things *for* one another. And this can be good and nice: when we send a card or flowers, or throw a big or small party, we can help those who are less fortunate in our eyes, or give donations. We do lots of things *for* people and that is lovely but, he says, what we need so much more of now is to be *with* others.

However, being with others is often the harder road to travel and for most of us it can be scary. To be *with* another is not just giving our possessions or a kind gesture, it requires the gift of ourselves. To be with others scrapes away layers or distance we may put up to protect or preserve ourselves. Being with others is a risk.

And, it is the risk taken by God and the greatest gift as Christians we receive from God. While God is certainly has done more *for* us than we can ask or imagine you, Our God is Emmanuel, *God with us*.

I believe the gem and hidden treasure of the Christian faith is that God in Christ is with us not only in the moments when things go well but the most difficult times of our lives, too.

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God*. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2015. This talk from Focus 2014, London also provides description of the concept of "with" addressed in *A Nazareth Manifesto*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ruhx6Gm2l9w>

Today, in our gospel we hear Jesus say, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”<sup>2</sup> In John’s gospel Jesus “glorification” comes not in his many miracles and healings, rather it comes in his passion—of which the etymological root means suffering—and his death.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is with us in his healing, his miracles, he is with us on the mountain top and, as we read about in the chapters leading to today’s gospel, his life. But the glorification, is when God—God-- goes through pain, loss, betrayal, doubt, abandonment, even death. The glorification is that through this God enters our own experiences of these in our life. God, the One of infinite love and mercy, is with us even when no one else wants to or knows how to be *with* us.

Jesus glorifies God by being with us, with the love of God, into the darkest hours of our lives, into death and through it.

It is the beauty and mystery of our faith. In the Eucharistic prayer we say: Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again. Again and again, Christ comes to us. In the most magnificent times and the worst. God does not will our pain, it is an unavoidable part of humanity. But with Christ there is no amount of pain we are left alone to endure. With Christ our pain is transformed.

It is the beauty and the challenge of our faith. It is a challenge at times to accept that God goes *with* us everywhere and that, as made in God’s image, we too are meant to walk *with* one another into the high places and into suffering and darkness. We will not do this as Christ does, we are not meant to--so completely and deeply--but we can venture into the depths of sorrow with others and we will be stronger when two or more are gathered. We need more being with, it is what transforms us all.

On Thursday of this week, a community town hall was called in East Austin in response to the package bombings in the city. Together, elected officials, the police chief and officers and members of the East Austin and wider community came together to share a moment of silence for the victims—Stephen House and Draylen Mason—and show support for families and friends suffering tragic loss and solidarity with frightened community members. This event was organized by two justice organizations in Austin often at odds with the police force, who invited police and officials to be present. It was ultimately about being *with* one another in grief and fear. The tensions were set aside by all sides, taken up instead by the more important need to be *with* one another at this time. Walking together, not at a distance. We need each other, our faith is one that is shared—with one another and with God not just in moments that are great but so to in those heaviest times when we all need help to get through.

God is with us, Christ is with us everywhere we could go—to great highs--next Sunday is Palm Sunday when we celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he is heralded and praised as king--an entry which precludes his passion—the betrayal, suffering and his death.

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<sup>2</sup> John 12:23

<sup>3</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Written that you may Believe*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003.

There is no amount of pain or joy God does not know—and God being with us there transforms our joy as well, as John’s gospel says, our “joy is made complete” *with* God.

To the highest joys and the darkest lows Christ has been everywhere—God’s love enters every experience and moment of our lives. God is with us always. And, on beautiful occasions, we are with one another, too. We are with one another, sharing, as Christ does with us, the love of God for each other.

For the rest of this Lenten journey, into Holy Week, may we ask for God’s help to be with others. Wherever they may be and that we may be assured that God is with us, now in our joy or sadness and always.

Great is the mystery of our faith.