

Pastor Roy's sermon from December 22, 2013 - Advent 4

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Especially this time of year, many find themselves thinking about and longing for Emmanuel, God with us. We sing, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel! How does God come among us? How does Christ come among us? Our lessons show us how some have experienced God with us.

What does “God with us” mean to Joseph? According to Matthew, he was a righteous man. In those days, it was expected that a righteous man would divorce an unfaithful wife. Mary's assumed infidelity must have been crushing in many ways. Yet in his dream the angel of the Lord suggests that he should not follow his inclination. The dream invites Joseph to think of righteousness not as a personal badge of honor to be defended at all cost. Instead, he is challenged to love Mary more than his own reputation and to listen to her side of the story. So, true righteousness is mercy, kindness, faithfulness—it is listening to the voice of the Spirit, and it's not subject to public opinion.

Thinking of Paul's experience of God with us in Romans, remember that Paul is one of the first to write of faith in Jesus Christ—most likely before the first gospel was written. Paul declares that the greatest declaration of Jesus as Son of God (God with us) is his resurrection from the dead. Resurrection is God with us. Christ is risen. We, too, have eternal life. God with us is Life without end, life with lasting value. Goodness and peace and hope. God is with us.

Resurrection is our foundation for the merciful, faithful life of God. This is God with us.

Peter also demonstrates God with us. God with all humanity, which was a new concept for the Jews who followed Jesus. Recall the Apostle Peter's vision of being commanded to eat unclean animals who are on a sheet lowered to the ground. Three times he is invited, three times he refuses, three times he is told not to call unclean anything God has cleansed. The vision changed his mind of who can be holy and who has value in God's sight. In other words, “God with us” means living God's mercy and love for all.]

Now, Christ's birth, which we will be soon celebrating is a wonder-filled thing! It is a reminder that God is with us. Mary and Joseph's willingness to follow the Spirit into faithful living demonstrates “God with us.” [Peter lived the same God with us when he welcomed Gentiles as new friends.] Paul found courage in Christ's resurrection and lived the same in his life after he discovered it. He learned to connect the dots of life found all around him. He invited everyone he met to give first place to this resurrection life. Nothing else mattered to Paul [and Peter] and Mary and Joseph. Resurrection is God with us. Freedom to live without fear. Freedom to love faithfully. Connecting the dots. Gathering all of life together as one—God with us.

God with us is fellowship with all of life. Our judgments are much less important than God's judgment of “God with us” for mercy and peace.

Lots of people talk of peace this time of year, but the peace of God-with-us is not something which we manufacture out of our desperate need for meaning and hope. God with us is the bedrock of our existence. We can't get away from God with us. It is the very fiber of our being. When we relate to the rest of creation, those relationships are God with us.

When we cannot feel God with us, the first step to finding it is to seek it. As Jesus encouraged us, seek and you will find. Seek God with us, and you will find God with us. It might not be an emotional experience, but if we truly seek God-with-us and sit with that desire, we will learn the secret of God with us. And there is much, much more to God with us than a “Merry Christmas.”

If you are confused, keep seeking the essence of your life. Find the true source, (or let the Source find you). We have “God with us” every step of the way, even though we often don't feel it. The rest of creation understands God with us, perhaps this is one way in which our brains get in the way. Join hands with creation, seek and find Emmanuel-God with us.

Find God with us in the life all around you, in the resurrection of our Lord and the inter-connectedness of our lives. God with us before us and after us. God with us above us and below us. God with us, without fail. Listen and follow where the Spirit of God leads you. Amen.