

*In the Presence of Christ*

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*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them NRSV*

This is a magnificent verse because, it is a magnificent promise from Jesus himself. In this short verse, Jesus promises to be in our midst wherever we may be. He is in our corporate worship, prayer, and in the observance of the Lord's Supper. I do not believe that this text is a consolation for a poor turnout. The term, *two or three*, I believe it is an idiom for a group of any size. This important truth is not the size of the gathering, but the presence of Jesus

We can be sure this promise from the supreme Master was a comfort to the first century Church. They were a tiny island of believers in a sea of paganism and unbelief. Christ is present in our prayer meetings and Bible study groups as surely as He is present in the sanctuary or a big coliseum crusade. This lovely gem records Jesus' conversation with those who first heard it and reminds us that Christ is present in our family gatherings and worship. *Where two* (perhaps a man and his wife) *or three* (along with their child) *come together in my name, I am there with them*. Christ is the Lord of the dinner table in our home as surely as He is Lord of the Communion Table here in the sanctuary

We need to remember that little is much when God is in it! God opened the Great Wall of China to diplomatic relations with a tiny ping-pong ball. Many times, He accomplishes great purposes with small, almost insignificant means.

Christ is present in our private prayer and worship. There is a story that touched my heart a few years ago and I like to tell it from time to time. Once under the old USSR government, an agent attended a worship service and took down all the names of those who were in attendance. As he stood up to leave he did one more headcount and compared it with his list. One worshiper piped up, *there is one person present whose name you don't have!* **No!** protested the agent, *I have the name of every one of you here. Jesus Christ is here*, said the believer.

Christians believe that God is universally present in the world. Psalm 91:1 sings, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork*. There is no place in creation where God is not present. I once served on an ordination committee for a man who tried to escape the Call of God to the ministry. He had joined the Navy and had sailed around the world but found that the Almighty was on the other side of the ocean as well as here at home. God's presence in the world is inescapable. Listen to the compelling poetry of

Psalm 139:7-12;

*Where shall I go from your Spirit?*

*Or where shall I flee from your presence?*

*If I ascend to heaven, you are there!*

*If I make my bed in Hell, you are there!*

*If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*

*If I say, "Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night,"*

*even the darkness is not dark to you, the night is bright as the day;*

*for darkness is a light to you.*

This passage inspired Francis Thompson to write the poem, The Hound of Heaven

We believe that God is particularly present in His world. At specific times and places His presence has been obvious and transforming. In Old Testament times, God called Moses before the burning bush. He called Abram to leave his homeland and go on a pilgrimage of faith, to go to a place he did not know where. God was present in the temple worship and called Isaiah to be His prophet. God was present in the great events of the Exodus and the Israelites' return from exile.

In New Testament times the Divine presence was not in doubt. *In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.* (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus was God's incarnate, *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* (John 1:14).

God is particularly present in our worship, our prayer and praise, in the preaching of the Word and in the drama of the Sacraments. God is very present in calling us to acknowledge His call to one of His own when we baptize, confirm, ordain, recognize, or install, and when we break the Bread and share of the Cup. If you will be confessional, you may acknowledge that God has been present in your life. It may have been in a moment of immediate danger when you cried out, *Oh God! Help me!* And He did. The Divine presence may well have been yours in the time of trouble or grief. In the midst of great loss or disappointment you may have felt comforted as you sensed His presence with you. God can be with us in our daily walk. We can learn to practice being in the presence of the Lord. Begin your prayer times by acknowledging He is with you. *"He walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own..."*

Is Christ real in your experience? Are you consciously aware of the Divine presence? Martin Luther declared, *God is here!* He also expressed an even more

significant thought: *God is here for you!* Can you acknowledge that and rejoice in it? None are so blind as those who refuse to see!

Baptism, the observance of the Lord's Supper, ordination to holy office, they each invite us into the presence of God to worship and to have fellowship with Him. Jesus said, *do this in remembrance of me* (Luke 22:19). The observance then sends us back out into our community to our responsibilities with new freedom and joy. It commands that we fulfil our various gifts of ministry, gifts of the Spirit, as we are charged to, *go and tell the Good News that Jesus Christ is Lord!* It constitutes a Call to Worship and a Call to serve. In the Lord's Supper we experience the presence of Christ, Cognito-in-fact.

As we come to Holy Table this morning, may Christ enter our minds that we may think His thoughts; may Christ flood our emotions, that we may feel His love; may Christ captivate our wills, that we may follow where He leads; and may Christ fill our bodies to heal and to bless. This we do today as we continue to meet him anew Christmas morning, or whenever He shall Call. Amen.