



In the early 90's I worked at a restaurant in a popular tourist town in Southern California. As a young person it was a fun place to be and I enjoyed opportunities to meet many people from different backgrounds. While most of the people I met were just passing through, I was able to develop a few important friendships with locals that gave me some sense of community and connection. One of my most cherished relationships during that time was with an older couple that would come to the restaurant around 9:00pm, Monday through Friday, to have a light snack and spend time talking with me while I finished up my shifts. I thought of them as older since I was in my early 20s and they were a few decades older than me. Our age gap was no hinderance to the fast development of a great friendship. During the years we spent time together, I introduced them to several of my other friends. It became a common occurrence that I would look up and see one of my friends walk through the front door of the restaurant and head over to their table to join them.

They had traveled the world for most of their adult life and I suspected that there was a military background. However, they were reluctant to tell any of us what their jobs had been.

Eventually one of my friends, who had just started a law enforcement career, figured it out. He discovered that this older gentleman who came into my restaurant every night was a real-life hero, the kind of man that Hollywood writers create action hero movie scripts about. After a very long and distinguished career in the service, he continued to serve as a consultant in many law enforcement settings. I kept quiet about what I had learned but the knowledge of who this

man really was had an enormous impact on the way I felt when he was around. I developed tremendous respect and admiration for him. I listened to his stories much more attentively. There was also one other feeling that I always had when he was around, the feeling of safety. I knew he could take care of himself and those he cared for, if trouble came around. I liked that he cared for me and the sense of security that his presence provided.

Why am I telling you this and what could the story possibly have to do with a Wednesday evening Bible lesson? Tonight I want to talk with you about one of the most comforting statements in all of scripture. As we read through the major stories of the Bible, from the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see this statement repeated often as the Lord speaks to those He cares for. This statement, "I will be with you" was used by the Lord, often, to comfort those He loved.

He says it to Isaac in Genesis 26:4. Jacob receives the same words in Genesis 31:3. Continue reading the stories of the history of God's people and you'll see the same words being spoken to Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Solomon and countless others as God continues to offer his presence to the people of Israel.

When Jesus sends out the disciples in the great commission, He gives them this promise, "***And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.***" Matthew 28:20

In Hebrews 13:5 God says "***I will never leave you or forsake you***".

One of the most amazing gifts we have as Christians is the presence of God with us. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul tells us that God's spirit dwells within us. Throughout the New Testament we read of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit within believers, empowering, strengthening, comforting, revealing truth and being a seal that guarantees our adoption, redemption and inheritance in God.

Right now, I am speaking with believers in mind, those who have faith in Christ. To you, I can say with full confidence, you are not alone. You are never alone. No law, no orders from those in government, no quarantine, no social distancing guidelines can interfere with the reality that God has promised you his presence. God is with us.

I am sure that you all know this. My concern is that we sometimes lose the wonder of what this really means. I am concerned that at times we might lose a sense of who it is that is with us. As uncertainty about our personal health, our nation's economy, laws, personal rights and social norms seem to dominate the daily public discourse, He continues to be with us. The danger is that we might be so focused on the things around us that we forget who it is that is within us. Saying "***He is with us***" should never cease to amaze us.

Let's think about how David described him in Psalm 29.

***¹ Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.***

***² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.***

***³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.***

***⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.***

***⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.***

***⁶ He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.***

***⁷ The voice of the LORD strikes
with flashes of lightning.***

***⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.***

***⁹ The voice of the LORD twists the oaks
and strips the forests bare.***

And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

***¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.***

What an awesome description of who it is that is with us, what He can do and is worthy of. David has described the transcendent, sovereign and glorious God. He is Holy. His power is beyond comprehension. He is enthroned King forever!

Don't miss what else David knows to be true about God. The Psalm concludes with these words

***¹¹ The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace.***

He is with us. His presence strengthens us. His presence gives us peace.

David knowing God, allowed him to say,

***Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.***

Psalm 23:4

Tonight my hope is that you are again filled with a sense of awe, knowing who is with you. My prayer is that you know that the God of angel armies is by your side, that He will never leave you or forsake you, that He will be with you always, to the end of the age. May you find what David said, to be true for you personally, that the Lord gives strength to his people and blesses us with peace.

You are loved

Tony