

When we've been part of the faith community, part of a church, and part of God's people for a long time, even the gospel story can become commonplace. Some have said cynically that just as a vaccination gives us a little bit of the flu but spares us from the real thing, so the church gives us a little bit of a life of faith but spares us from the real thing. I hope nobody at our church would say that, but the sentiment is understandable. If I sing some songs, listen to some prayers, take my communion, and sit through a long sermon, then I feel I've done my spiritual duty and can live for myself for the rest of the week.

This is one reason why we have to surround ourselves with people new to the faith. These people have not yet lost their sense of awe, of wonder, of amazement at the story of God and of His amazing gift for us. They still "get it" when often we old timers don't...

It's amazing that God would choose to create us to live with Him. This was not because God was lonely, or couldn't care for the world Himself. This was a pure act of love for us, to create us to be With Him. From Eden in the beginning to the New Jerusalem at the end and throughout all the time in between, God promises to be with us and then is. From the Ark of the Covenant ("where God dwelt") to the Temple ("where God lived") to Jesus Himself ("God in a bod"), God was with us at all times, both spiritually and practically. We need never be lonely, or lack anything, for God the Provider is with us. And perhaps the greatest gift we receive is the chance to love Him in return.

It's amazing the power of sin. It's power, seen in the beginning chapters of the bible, is to separate us from God's presence (though never His love). Yet this isn't by it's own power but by enticing us to walk away. Our sin shames us, and so we hide from God, fight with each other, and even turn on ourselves.

It's amazing the power of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, "God With Us". Jesus showed us the way back to God's presence through His life and teaching, and then died to become The Way back to God's presence. We call what happened when Jesus died on the cross for us "Atonement", and say that Jesus Atoned for us. What exactly does this mean? Atonement is "At-One-Ment", or the act of being At One with God once again. For those who trust in Jesus' death in our place instead of trusting in our own good deeds for their own salvation, we are At One with God.

Jesus' final words in the book of Matthew are these, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." God created us to be with Him, and when our own sin separated us from Him, He stood by us, and then sent His Son to bring us back to Him. And as we live into this reality as God's people, we are gifted once again with the Holy Spirit, God With Us to empower and guide. We'll talk more about that tomorrow, but until then, ponder these questions:

1. How close do you feel to God today? Remember that regardless, God has not left you.
2. Have you put your trust in Jesus' life and death for us when it comes to eternity with God?
3. If not, who could you talk to about it? Before another day goes by, call them, text them, Zoom them, and ask.