

Looking to Jesus: Jesus is Present Pastor Mike Stern

Main idea: Jesus is present

Purpose: To encourage people to recognize the reality of Jesus' presence through their imagination

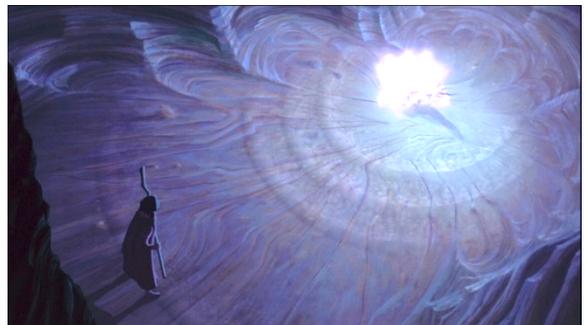
Passage: Matthew 1:18-23

Introduction

You're probably going to think this is stupid...

Have you ever seen the movie *The Prince of Egypt*? It's the Disney version of the story of Moses, and God rescuing the Israelites from Egypt through Moses. It's a good movie—good music, good cast. I don't need to tell you how many times I've seen the movie—it's been a recurring favorite for our kids.

Even though I've seen it a lot, there's this one scene that just GETS me every time. **It's the burning bush scene, where God calls out to Moses from this bush that's on fire but isn't burning up.** It's from Exodus chapter three. Both in the Bible and in the movie, God says, "***Take the sandals from your feet for the place where you're standing is holy ground.***"



In the movie, the flames kind of pulse to the voice of God *(which, by the way is the voice of Val Kilmer—who also voices Moses,, so in a way, he's just talking to himself), and the light in the scene is done really well. **The scene always captures my attention, and it always just kinda stirs something in me.** *(That's the part that I thought you might find stupid.)

I think what stirs in me when I'm watching this scene is that I'm feeling an emotion about being in the presence of God. I'm trying to relate to Moses in the scene as he approaches the bush and hears the voice of God and takes off his sandals. **He is in the presence of the Creator. It's a holy experience.**

I get the same kind of feeling as I'm reading the story in Exodus or any of the other many descriptions of God's presence in the Bible.

God's presence with His people is a core aspect of our theology, of our faith. The passage that Eden read earlier ends with a quote from Isaiah, where the prophet says that *a virgin will give birth to a son and he will be called Immanuel, which means God with us.* **That's what we celebrate in this whole season! It's the coming of God in the flesh in Jesus—it's the incarnation—the taking on of flesh by God so that He would be with us.**

Moses knew how important God's presence was. Later on in Exodus, after Moses has brought the Israelites out of Egypt, across the Sea of Reeds, and to Mount Sinai, the Israelites disobey the first commandment that God gives them, and they make a golden calf so that they can bow down and worship it. God's like, "Moses, you're gonna have to take it from here because I'm not going to go with these people. I'll send an angel with you to the Promised Land, but I will not go myself."

Moses responds:

"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (Exodus 33:15-16)

How will anyone know that the Creator is on our side unless You're actually with us?

Throughout the rest of Israel's wanderings, it is repeated and emphasized over and over again that God was indeed with them, and He was with them in the form of a cloud and fire, guiding them through the wilderness.

God's presence and His glory was often seen as a fire—like fire descending upon Mt Sinai when the people first arrive there; fire descending on the tabernacle when Moses and the Israelites first constructed it, and as fire descending upon the first temple when Solomon constructed it.

It was big and dramatic—highly visible and a bit terrifying!

But things weren't always that way for Israel. In fact, later on, God's glory actually leaves the temple and God's people are taken back into captivity. And, although some of them came back from captivity, things were never the same again. God never showed himself to be with them in the same way that He was before.

But they were waiting for Him to—they were anticipating that God would be present with them again in some significant way.

God does indeed show up again in a significant way, but in a far less dramatic way. There isn't the same burning bush. There isn't the same cloud and fire. There isn't the same visibility for all of Israel to see. **There's a baby born in humble conditions. A human like us.**

How much more present can Jesus be than to be human like us? He became all that we are. In the Gospel of John, it says that the eternal word of God, Jesus, "*made his dwelling among us.*" And He lived a human life. He interacted with people, talked with them, touched them, healed them, wept for them, **showing us how to be present with others now. I would argue that that is a more substantial presence of God than when God showed up in the cloud and fire.** He is Immanuel, God with us. The Creator with us.

I mean, that's great....for those who got to touch Him, and talk to Him, and see Him. But it's different now. **Just as the Israelites didn't always see a dramatic expression of God's presence, we don't see Jesus now like those who lived with Him in the first century.**

But Jesus is still present. Our reading today is from the first chapter of Matthew, where we see that Jesus is *God with us*. In the final chapter—in fact, the final verse of Matthew—Jesus says, “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus is right here in the room with us.

- Jesus is with you when you drive away from here.
- Jesus is with you in your home,
- at work with you,
- when you're hanging out with friends;
- when you're not thinking about Him at all,
- or when you're crying out to Him for help. **You're never alone.**

We have to trust that that is true, even when we don't see it. Psalm 77 says,

*Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.* (Psalm 77:19)

God was there in the Exodus even when He couldn't be seen, walking with His people as He led them out of captivity.

There may be times when some of you have experienced a more dramatic moment of Jesus' presence. Maybe a particular sense or feeling.

But I think a lot of our experience of Jesus' presence requires our imagination. *Which doesn't mean that you're making up that He's around. He's here already. **But sometimes for us to experience that, we have to imagine what that's like and in what ways He is actually here.**

We have to imagine Him leading Israel across the sea. We can imagine Him sitting in the seat next to us, or sitting in the car with us, or His hand on our shoulder. **The more we nudge ourselves to do that, the more we recognize and acknowledge His very real presence with us.**

Kind of like how I get caught up in the scene of the burning bush in *The Prince of Egypt*. **Through my imagination, I let myself enter into that scene enough that the thought of God's presence moves me in some way.** Or perhaps how Joseph—after hearing the angel say that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit and that the child would save his people from their sins—he had to imagine the possibility of that in order to obey what the angel was saying.

When I imagine the reality of Jesus here with me now, it connects me with that reality more than simply the knowledge of His presence.

As I pray now, I'd like you to imagine how Jesus is present in this room with us. You can do that with your eyes open or your eyes closed. But think about Jesus here in the space.

We're going to shift now to a more experiential aspect of the service that our Creative Community has put together. To get us started with that, Jubilee Rosensteel, who is part of our Creative Community, is going to come and share a quote by Madeleine L'Engle.

"But unless we are creators we are not fully alive. What do I mean by creators? Not only artists, whose acts of creation are the obvious ones of working with paint or clay or words. Creativity is a way of living life, no matter our vocation or how we earn our living. Creativity is not limited to the arts, or having some kind of important career."

Corrie Rosensteel is also a part of our Creative Community. Corrie has put her creative mind and soul to work to help us connect with the truth of Jesus' presence through a pair of art projects.

1) *Corrie, talk a little bit about your thought process for today's theme and what we are about to do. How does this all tie together?*

Creative Practice Introduction

- God is present over all, as creator of all, the master builder
- God chose and still chooses to be present as Jesus the Messiah, as the Holy Spirit within His people
- We are created in God's image; made to be present and create
- Creativity reflects the identity, character and imagination of its creator
- Imagination is like a muscle that strengthens with use and atrophies with disuse

2) *I understand we are doing two different projects. Tell us about the first one, and how we can participate. (Use the links to be able to download files to create with.)*

- **Evidence of God [Fingerprint](#)**
 - o Use colored pencils/pens
 - o Can include both writing and illustration
 - o Take home

Let's transition to our second art expression

- Community **Creative Hands of Creation [Handprint](#)**
 - o Use colored pencils/pens/markers
 - o Can include both writing and illustration
 - o Bring or send to church for collaborative art piece in gallery