

“God Is With Us”
Rev. Bill Freeman
December 18, 2016
Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday School was underway. The teacher had told the children that they could draw anything they wanted. The teacher was walking around looking at what the students were drawing. She came upon little Susie, and little Susie was drawing intensely. So the teacher asked little Susie, “What are you drawing?” Little Susie said, “I’m drawing God.” The Sunday School teacher said, “Well, Susie, nobody knows what God looks like.” Little Susie said, “Well they will when I’m finished!”

God is a mystery. Nobody does know what God looks like. Some people think that God looks like a white-bearded man sitting on a cloud someplace in heaven. Other people think that God looks like a spirit, whatever a spirit looks like. Nobody knows what God sounds like either. I imagine God sounds like a baseball announcer, like Vince Scully or Ernie Harwell. But who knows. And nobody knows what God is like. Although the Bible does give us some hints. Psalm 116 says God is merciful. Psalm 46 says God is our refuge. My favorite verse is I John 4:16, “God is love,” which tells me that if there’s a passage in the Bible in which God is not love, then that passage is not of God. So God is a mystery. We don’t know what God looks like, although many people believe that God looks like Jesus.

“Jesus is coming! Look busy!” That’s the old joke. But Jesus is coming one week from today. Jesus is coming on Christmas Day, on December 25. Actually, the baby Jesus is coming and we will welcome the baby Jesus. It’s good to welcome the baby Jesus, because it’s Christmas, and we all want Jesus to be born again on Christmas Day. To be born in our hearts. But, as we say, nobody knows what Jesus looked like. We know that Jesus will be born, because it says in the first chapter of Matthew that Mary is pregnant. She’s engaged to Joseph, but they’re not married. Joseph was going to drop her like a hot potato, but then he has a vision of an angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord comes to Joseph and says, “Joseph, don’t be afraid. You can take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” The angel of the Lord told Joseph, “You will name your Son, Jesus, for he will save the people from their sins.” So Joseph takes Mary as his wife, but they do not have marital relations until after Jesus is born. All this was predicted by a prophet, the prophet Isaiah, who said the virgin will give birth to a child and they will name him Emmanuel, that is, God is with us. So that is what happened on December 25th a couple thousand years ago.

God is with us. What does that mean exactly? Does that mean that God is with us in our time of need? Does that mean that God is with us when we’re sick and brings us back to health? Does that mean that God is with us when we’re ready to just end it all and brings us back to life? Has God been with you in your time of need? Has God been with you when you were sick and brought you back to health? Has God been with you when you were going to end it all and brought you back to life? I know that God has been with me many times. But the passage says that Emmanuel means God is with us and it refers to Jesus. So does that mean that Jesus is with us in our time of need? Does that mean that Jesus is with us when we’re sick and brings us back to health? Does that mean that Jesus is with us when we’re going to end it all and brings us back to life? I know that Jesus has been with me many times. I hope that he’s been with you many times. God is with us. But how can we remember that God is with us?

The Creation Story reminds us that God is with us. In the first chapter of Genesis it says that God said, let us make humankind in our image, in the image of God, God made them. Male and female God made them. And God blessed them. And what it means by “God blessed them,” according to a seminary class I had, is that God gave us the ability to procreate. And we have been procreating for many years, to the point where we now have more than 7 billion people on the earth. But how does all that remind us that God is with us?

A mirror reminds you that God is with you, that God is with us. When you see your reflection in a mirror, you remember that you are made in the image of God and you are reminded that God is with us. When you see your neighbor, you remember that your neighbor is made in the image of God and you are reminded that God is with us. When you see anyone, you are reminded that God is with us, that you are made in the image of God and God is with us. Maybe that will help us to end conflict. Because when you see your co-worker, whom you are arguing with, you are reminded that your co-worker is made in the image of God and you remember that God is with us. When you see your spouse that you are arguing with, you remember that your spouse is made in the image of God, and you’re reminded that God is with us. When you see your rebellious teenager, whom you are arguing with for taking your car without permission, you remember that your rebellious teenager is made in the image of God and you remember that God is with us. Maybe one day this will end all conflict, when we remember that the person halfway across the world, that we’re at war with, is made in the image of God, maybe we’ll remember that God is with us and that will bring an end to war.

Jesus doesn't just say that God is with us. Jesus says that we are gods. According to the gospel of John, chapter 10, Jesus says, "I am God's Son." That drives the religious leaders of Jesus' day nuts! They say, "You are blaspheming, equating yourself with God." Jesus says, "No, it's written in the scripture, 'You are gods,' so it's OK for me to say, "I am God's Son." I love it when Jesus drives the religious leaders of his day nuts. I wonder if Jesus still drives the religious leaders of our day nuts. Because he's not just saying that he is the Son of God, he's saying that we are gods. Now I don't know whether we are gods, but I do like the idea that we are made in the image of God, that we are the children of God. That we are Jesus' brothers and sisters and that God is our Father. Remember that Jesus also says in John, when he's resurrected, that he says, "I am ascending to my God and your God. I am ascending to my Father and your Father." Whoa!

The Lord's Prayer is sometimes called the Our Father, because, as you know, The Lord's Prayer begins "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." Jesus did not teach us to say, "My Father and not your Father." Jesus said, "Our Father." So God isn't just Jesus' Father. God is our Father as well. That's what Jesus is saying to us. Because we are made in the image of God. We are the children of God. That means that Jesus is our brother.

A Christmas carol reminds us that Jesus is our brother. The Christmas carol is entitled "Jesus Our Brother, Kind and Good." The Christmas carol says, "Jesus our brother kind and good, was humbly born in a stable rude. The friendly beasts around him stood. Jesus our brother kind and good." I like that Jesus is our brother, because then we have the ability, we have the capacity, to be kind and good, just like Jesus. Jesus is our brother and we are God's sons and daughters, we are the children of God.

What do you think of that? What does that mean to you? God is our Father. Jesus is our brother. We are children of God. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus. Now maybe all of this is a little too much to wrap our minds around at Christmas time. The only thing we're supposed to do at Christmas time is wrap presents and maybe wrap our minds around the fact that Jesus is about to be born, and welcome Jesus on Christmas Day. But I think it's important to think about that at some point, that God is our Father, that Jesus is our brother, that we are sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus. So that Little Sunday School Susie, who's trying to draw a picture of God, should know that God looks like her. And God looks like you. Look at those near you. Look at those near you. You are looking at the image of God. And we should all remember that God is with us.

Let us pray:
God of love,
Help us to know that you are with us.
Help us to know that Jesus is with us.
And help us to see you and Jesus in everyone we meet.
Now and forevermore,
By the power of the Holy Spirit
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*