

Pastor Troy E. Medlin
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Peace. Presence. Promise.

I love where I am from. I'm a Belonger. Home means a lot to me. I've only lived in two states. I spent one year living in Minnesota, and I really liked it. I've been to the State Fair, taken Interstate 35 up to Duluth and down to the Iowa border. But Illinois is the state of my heart. From Chicago to Carbondale, Dekalb to Decator, Rockford to Rantoul, Sandwich to Summit. You get the idea. Most of all, it is where my people are and I like to be near them. Remember what I said about home?

After I finished my internship and Ole was back in Chicago I stayed in Minnesota a few extra weeks filling in for my supervisor. As time passed I longed to be back in Illinois. The desire got stronger with each passing day. I started wearing a white sox hat just to feel closer. I was lonely. I wanted proximity. Connection, support, Love, and the people I knew. Everything I wanted to be with felt far away. Proximity makes all the difference in the world.

We know about distance. The space between the ideal and our lived experience. Shame and acceptance. The miles that speak of dreams and disappointment. The chasm created by death, despair. The geography we thought was home suddenly unfamiliar. Hearts troubled, fears abound. common terrain. Believe it or not, in the second half of May, Memorial Day Weekend, it is still Easter. Throughout the past weeks the messages that we have encountered again and again is that the risen Christ is never far away. He will always find his way to you. Through locked doors, empty nets, sleepless nights, across divides, amid failure, and through our own fickle faith, even when it seems to completely fade. Jesus said, "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." Hidden in John 14, in Jesus' farewell discourse, the night before his own death he promises presence. He says, "I am going away and I am coming to you." Resurrection and ascension turn everything upside down. God moves cross-directionally if you will.

Thursday is The Feast of the Ascension. Speaking of proximity, we often associate ascension with the risen Christ going away to the right hand of God. In some churches they even extinguish the paschal candle that day to symbolize Jesus' departure. Remember Jesus's promise though, and all we've seen this Easter?

Luther talked about the right hand of God being everywhere. We might say especially in the places where the world turns away, In the midst of the gulf between what is and what is to be, in

the shadowy, lonely, forsaken and broken places of this world and your life. God will not abandon you. The cross is the locus of it all.

In the creed we confess that he descended to hell. If he has been there, as Vitor Whesthelle said, then nothing, nowhere, and no one is out of God's reach. You will never leave the gaze of our stubbornly faithful God.

Wherever you go-- you will never be alone. Nothing will be able to separate *you* from the love of God. God is not ashamed of you.

Cross-directionally, ascension is about God moving further down to you and me. Deeper into our own bodies and this wounded earth. So much so that his body will be placed in your hands today. Not a symbol or remembrance of it. His body. All of it. Given for you. Not only that- but The Advocate, the Holy Spirit is poured out on your flesh. God- taking up residence in your body. Just as you are. Courage. Your constant compannion. That is who you belong to.

John's scene in Revelation is in conversation with our entrance hymn and other parts of scripture. We don't see a vision of an immortal, invisible God, inaccessible, hidden from our eyes. That is not the God that Luther helps us discover- forever revealed under the crooked, jagged signs of the opposite. Cross-directional, In weakness. The slain lamb the center of cosmic adoration, and the one who will never stop coming toward you. Sight, sound, taste, touch.

Even in the end, the holy city is coming *down* out of heaven from God. The throne of God and the lamb will be in it, we will see his face, and his name will be on our foreheads and we will not be burned up. Fear will be buried for good. No need to hide. There will be no more night; we will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be our light, and we will reign forever. Distance erased.

Earlier this month we were able to go to Alberta for Ole's grandma's funeral. She lived all 102 years of her life an hour south of Edmonton tending to a ranch with cattle and a garden that nourished roots that still bear fruit. It was such a gift to be there, and to spend time with Ole's family. As has happened before, they embraced me. In the most conservative province in Canada. With their stetsons and work boots, farmers, ranchers, oil workers who have become family, came close. Entered into my story. Fully known and fully loved from outside of myself. I was able to exhale. Relax into my own skin. I would say I felt a peace that the world could not give as it flowed through me unbidden like the river flowing from the tree of life. I couldn't buy it, only receive it. That's how it goes. Receiving not taking.

Where have you received that peace? Where do you crave it so much? All is grace. For you. Proximity makes all the difference in the world.