

God is... Omnipresent
Ps 139:6-12, 1 Kings 8:27-30

Brothers and sisters, in our modern cities filled with skyscrapers and other large buildings the awe and wonder that the Israelites would have felt upon beholding the Temple that Solomon built is somewhat lost on us.

Solomon's temple measured in at 90' long, 30' wide and 45' feet high and if you are looking for a bit of a reference point for that - Valleyview is 100' long and 50' wide and the peak of our sanctuary roof from the inside is approximate 50' high. So, Solomon's temple would have fit nicely right inside this church building

But the average Israelite in Solomon's day would only be familiar with the small one-story homes that would have made up their towns and villages and maybe some two-story structures in the larger cities. So, Solomon's Temple would have been an impressive structure for them, And it was likely the largest building they would see for the next thirteen years until Solomon finished work on his palace

which measured at 150' long, 75' wide and 45' high – just a little bit larger than Valleyview.

And when I was looking for some images of Solomon's Temple that I could show you, I also came across images of Herod's Temple, the Temple Jesus would have been familiar with when He was on earth – and I found one that shows how Solomon's temple stacks up against Herod's Temple... I didn't realize how much larger Herod's Temple was compared to Solomon's.

And here's Herod's Temple sitting on the structure that was known as The Temple Mount... Things are definitely getting larger, and it kind of reminded me about perspective videos – maybe you've seen some of these show up on your social media feed.

They start out with something that's relatively similar or familiar to you in terms of size or height and then they begin to compare larger items in proper scale to give you a sense of

just how they compare to each other, like this picture of tall buildings here...

And these kinds of pictures and videos are also very useful to give us a sense of how things keep getting bigger and bigger and bigger not just in terms of buildings but in terms of our planet, our solar system, outer space and the universe – maybe you’ve seen this video...

It starts to take us up up and away all the way to the edge of the universe I think... and from some 2014 USA Today calculations that I found online I discovered that the amount of time it would take us to get to the moon based on our current travel technology is apx 1 to3 days.. to get to Mars would take 150-300 days... traveling all the way to the outer reaches of our solar system would be 40 years, so if you launched into space to make this expedition when you were one year old – you could travel to the end of the solar system and then make your way back to earth by the time you turned 80 years old... so, it’s doable at least in terms of the lifetime that we have.

Because to travel to the nearest star would require 80,000 years – exponentially beyond our lifetimes, and the nearest galaxy is even farther away and would take 749 million years to reach... And to make it all the way to the end of the known universe would require 225 trillion years. Of course, if we could travel at the speed of light, which is 186 000 miles per second, then it would cut down the travel time to about 93 billion light years.

Staggering measurements anyway you slice it – they are pretty much impossible for us to fully comprehend, and considering how a magnificent building or a majestic mountain can be so imposing for us – I think if we experienced the minutiae of inner space or the immensity of outer space it would simply overwhelm us.

Of course, all of these staggering measurements are simply not even on the same playing field when it comes to God in his infinite being. In our scripture passage this morning King Solomon rightly proclaims *“will God really dwell on earth? The*

heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27)

So brothers and sisters, the truth about God’s infinite being is that He is simply beyond space. Not only is God able to be present in every part of space, but because space – even infinite space – is created by Him – He is uncreatedly infinitely immensely beyond it! In theological terms this is what we call God’s Immensity and His Omnipresence.

I love this definition that I came across by theologian Louis Berkhof that God’s Immensity and Omnipresence is *“that perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations and is yet present in every point of space with His whole being.”*

This is why even though King Solomon is fully aware of God’s immensity he is also able to ask that God turn his attention to the Temple and hear and respond to the prayers of the King and the people.

God is a God who transcends everything but He is still able to be present and draw close to us – to be immanent with us and to His creation. It’s because of God’s immanence that He was able to promise to Solomon that His very Name would Be in this temple.

Given what we learned last week about God’s Name – Yahweh, I AM – it is no small matter for God to say that His Name would Be in the temple. When people came to the Temple they could encounter God’s presence... they could even just pray in the direction of the Temple, towards the Temple and their prayers would be heard by God – because He was present in the Temple, His Name would be there.

So, brothers and sisters – as we continue to learn about God this month and as we focus on God’s Immensity and Omnipresence this morning, let us ponder and wonder and be in awe at how amazing and great God is... that He is both transcendent beyond everything and yet able to be present with us in the limitations of space with His whole Being.

And that's a good place to clarify what God's omnipresence means and what it doesn't mean.

Many people today, prefer to focus on God's proximity in His omnipresence instead. You might hear such people say things like *"I believe god is all around us, god in everything and in everyone..."* you might even think similar thoughts yourself.

However brothers and sisters, this is pantheism; god in all (pan) or panentheism; god is **in** all and is not a correct or scriptural way of talking about God because it denies God's transcendence and His distinctiveness from His creation.

Biblically speaking while God is omnipresent, it does not mean that God is no longer distinct from what He has made, or that we all have a little spark of the divine essence in each of us. While God is everywhere present, He still remains distinct and transcendent from His creation as it's Creator.

This one-sided error is partly reaction to those who have wrongly explained God's transcendence in such a way that

God appears as distant, remote and unconcerned with the trivial affairs of insignificant human beings. This error is known as Deism, or as I like to call it the Bette Midler approach, where *"god is watching us – from a distance"*

But such explanations of transcendence are not in line with scripture. Psalm 8:4 corrects this misunderstanding for us, David writes *"what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"* David is well aware that compared to God's Divinity we are as nothing, yet David knows that God is mindful of us and that He cares for us.

God omnipresence includes both His transcendence and his immanence, and this is not contradictory because they both support each other – His transcendence makes it possible for Him to be immanent and His ability to be immanent with the fullness of His presence in every part of His creation, unlike anything, means He must be transcendent.

Isn't God amazing brothers and sisters, I mean you could not know anything else about God except for the fact that He is

omnipresent and it is still enough to blow your mind and leave you in awe.

But you know what the most frequent response I encounter whenever I explain God's omnipresence to someone... People will say *"well if God is everywhere, why do I need to come to church? Then why do I have to attend worship on Sunday morning, why can't I worship God on the golf course instead?"*

That tells you something about how sin affects our human nature doesn't it. We are confronted with a Being who is amazing beyond our comprehension in this way, and we just see it as a loophole that excuses us from coming to church.

So its important that we understand, without diminishing that God is fully present everywhere, His omnipresence does not mean this His presence through His work and activity are the same throughout the universe. Let me explain...

Scripture is very clear that God dwells in Heaven, not on earth. Isaiah 66:1 Yahweh says *"Heaven is my throne, and the earth*

is my footstool." And in Revelation 4 the apostle John is given a vision into Heaven and He sees the Almighty, seated on His heavenly throne surrounded by the angles and saints and the four living creatures who are worshipping Him. So even though God is omnipresent, He dwells in Heaven in a way which He does not dwell on the earth.

And we should understand that Heaven is the Spiritual dimension of Creation – its not simply the place up above the earth where the stars and planets are, and while God's omnipresence upholds the existence of every part of the universe, both spiritual and physical, God didn't create life everywhere across this universe, He chose to create human beings in His Image here on earth, not on Mars or in another galaxy...

And when God created our planet and brought about life and He created the fish and the birds and the animals and all other the creatures that He brought to life – He did not make them in His Image as He did when He created Humans as Man and Woman. (Genesis 1:26-27) God's rule and reign over the earth

and the universe were and are present in humans in a way they are not in the animals and other creatures.

And as the story of scripture progresses - God's reveals His presence to Abraham in a way that He does not do for anyone else. He makes Covenant promises with him in Genesis 12:2-3, God says to Abraham *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless **you**, and whoever curses **you** I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through **you**."* So, God would be present with Abraham and work in a different way than He would be present or work with anyone else.

And this continued on with Abraham's descendants when God made them into the nation of Israel, and what God says to them illustrates so well how God is omnipresent and yet is specifically present with Israel in a particular and unique way. In Exodus 19:5-6 God says to them *"Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

Do you see how this works? While God is fully present everywhere in His creation and above and beyond it... the works which He does through His presence, by His own good will and wisdom, are not everywhere the same...

Furthermore, it has always been God's intention that although He is Omnipresent in His creation, it is His desire that His presence should be mediated to His creation. That is what He reveals to us in Genesis 1:26 when He says *"Let us make mankind in our Image, in Our likeness so they may rule..."*

While God is Omnipresent, He desires to be immanent in His Creation through human beings representing Him, mediating His presence.

And when Adam and Eve failed the test as mediators of God's presence – being tricked by the devil into acting **as** God, instead of **as** His mediators and eating from the tree - the consequence was that were banished from the garden, they could no longer be IN God's presence – even though God was

still omnipresent outside of the Garden, they were not IN His presence or mediating it as God initially desired.

But this is God's will and God's plan and it hasn't changed, that's why when God chose Israel, he told them they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, their purpose was to mediate the Divine presence to the nations around them. This is why Solomon was building a Temple where God had said His Name would dwell – it was a specific place where people could come to seek God and encounter His presence in a special way – even though... God is omnipresent throughout all of His Creation.

And just a short side note here – this is also why many people prefer pantheism or panentheism where god is all around us, god is in each of us and so on... because to hear that God is acting in a specific way in a specific place and that He is present there in a way He is not present here... well how do you feel about that? We're like why isn't God doing something special here with me??!! Why them??!! It's a

pretty high claim to say that you are mediating God – what's so special about you??!!

It also means that we need to change and adjust ourselves to what God is doing and go where He is working and admit that we weren't in line with Him. But it's much more convenient for our sinful nature to believe that god is everywhere and in everything, because it gives us a sense of divine validation for whatever we are doing with our lives – but that is not God's omnipresence, that just our sinful nature justifying itself.

So, if we can see and understand that God's omnipresence is not about God working in the same way everywhere throughout His creation – then not only do understand why we need to be in Church on Sunday and not out on the golf course – we will also then ask what is so special or significant about God's omnipresence?? Apart from how amazing it is to be able to be present everywhere at the same time...

Well brothers and sisters – its this... God's omnipresence means that there is no part of His creation in which God's

presence can't do all that God has specifically planned or willed or intends to do. God is not limited in anyway by any part, or conditions, or elements or contents throughout the entirety of His creation to act through His presence as He so wills.

Think about it – God chose to be present with, and through Israel, a rag-tag group of slaves whom He had to form into a nation of priests in order to mediate His presence. He was not limited by where they were located, or the time in history when He chose to act – God is omnipresent and His presence can bring His plans to pass wherever and whenever.

Moses understood this I think, because when God chose him to lead Israel through the desert and up into the Promised Land, Moses said *"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."* (Exodus 33:15)

David understood this as well. In Psalm 139 he proclaims there is no where he can flee from God! God is up in the heavens and down the in depths, God is in the east where the

sun rises and in the west where it sets. David is not just marveling at how Immense God is – but he is testifying to the fact that God's specific presence with Him has anointed Him to become King over Israel and lead the people so they would be faithful to their calling as a nation of Priests.

And regardless of where David would be spatially in God's creation, or if He were to try to find somewhere to flee away from this anointing presence, like Jonah... God's presence will work wherever David is located to accomplish God's plans. Thus David writes in vs. 10 *"even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."* God is Omnipresent.

Now I wanted to make sure that for as much as it is mind blowing for us to contemplate the "Omni" in God's Omnipresence, we didn't miss out on understanding the significance of God's presence and what it means that God is with us, and that His presence with us is not limited by anything located anywhere in His creation and that He intends for us to mediate His presence.

So, let's do a quick inventory of what comes to us when God's presence is present.

Psalm 16:11 says *"you will fill me with joy in your presence..."*

Psalm 31:20 says *"in the shelter of your presence..."*

Psalm 89:15 says *"in the light of your presence..."*

Psalm 102:28 says *"your servants will live in your presence..."*

And God's presence brings all His wonderful qualities, His attributes, His perfections as well; His goodness, His truth, His wisdom, His love, His justice, His judgment, His holiness and His sovereignty.

And God's plan for Israel to mediate His presence has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the true Israel, 1 Timothy 2:5 testifies to this *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus..."*

And even though Jesus Christ has ascended to Heaven, to sit at God's right hand, He continues to mediate the presence of God on Earth through His Body – His Church, us... and this is

possible because He has sent His Holy Spirit to fill us as He promised He would. The Holy Spirit in us is the presence of God in us – since 1 Corinthians 2:10 reveals that *"the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God"* the Holy Spirit is God, and when we are filled with the Spirit God himself is filling us.

Paul is then able to say in 2 Corinthians 5:20 *"we are therefore Christ's ambassadors"* we continue to bear the responsibility of mediating God's presence to the creation; this is why Romans 8:19 says *"For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed."*

And our mediation of God's presence restores others to become mediators as well. This is the heart of the great commission in Matt 28:18-20 where Jesus commands us to go make disciples, mediating the presence of God, bringing others from all nations into the presence of God by immersing them into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that He has commanded us... and then there is that last line... and I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS to the end of the age.

In light of what we have learned about God's omnipresence and His presence – doesn't this take on a whole new level of understanding for us now??

Jesus is also Omnipresent - which is amazing... because it means Jesus fully God – and also that there is no part of His creation in which Christ's presence can't do all that God has specifically planned or willed or intends to do.

Christ is not limited in anyway by any part, or conditions, or elements or contents throughout the entirety of His creation to act through His presence in His command for us go and make disciples, to mediate God's presence here on earth to His creation.

Everything we have learned about God's omnipresence and presence is true about Jesus Christ, His command for us to go and make disciples, and His promise to be with us.

So, where can we go brothers and sisters if we wanted to avoid this calling? Where can we flee the Spirit of Jesus

Christ? Nowhere... Christ is Omnipresent, and wherever we are, wherever He sends us, wherever He has placed us as mediators - we can be assured that His presence is with us – His hand will guide us and His right hand will hold us fast.

God is amazing brothers and sisters, not only is He immense beyond the entire creation in His Being, but He is immanently close to us in the midst of it – and He desires for us to specifically mediate His presence to it, and He will never leave us or forsake us as we are obedient to this calling on our lives.

So, brothers and sisters, lift up your eyes, open your hearts, turn your face towards God's presence in Christ and may the presence of the Lord fill you with all joy, strength, power, hope, peace and all the riches of God Himself.

All praise and Glory be to the Omnipresent God – Amen.