

The Opposite of Presence

by Mike Tucker *

(From a "Slice of Infinity" blog by Jill Carattini, April 22, 2013)

In a poem titled "Moments of Joy" Denise Levertov tells the story of an old scholar who takes a room on the next street down from his grown children—"the better to concentrate on his unending work, his word, his world." And though he comes and goes while they sleep, his children feel bereft. They want him nearer.

But at times it happens that a son or daughter wakes in the dark and finds him sitting at the foot of the bed, or in the old rocker—"sleepless in his old coat, gazing into invisible distance, but clearly there to protect as he had always done." The child springs up and flings her arms about him, pressing a cheek to his temple and taking him by surprise: "Abba!" the child exclaims, and Levertov concludes:

"And the old scholar, the father,
is deeply glad to be found.
That's how it is, Lord, sometimes;
You seek, and I find."

Though many would like to say that the majority of our lives have been spent searching for God, perhaps it is more accurate to say that we have been sought. Even so, like the children in Levertov's poem, time and again I know I find myself bereft of his presence. Sometimes it feels like I am just sitting in the dark.

Here is a truth that may seem difficult to grasp: God's presence is not the opposite of God's absence. What is meant by this truth? Even when you are most stirred by God's nearness—when God's presence seems an undeniable truth—are you not also stung simultaneously by the ache of longing to be nearer or the reality of not quite yet being at home? In our best encounters with God, presence and absence remain intertwined. What might this then mean for the moments when you are feeling tormented by God's absence?

When children go to bed at night, eventually they learn that the darkness of their room does not imply the absence of a caring person. Isn't it amazing that as adults, we must learn the same lesson again as it relates to our Heavenly Parent? The darkness of this moment does not imply the absence of a caring God in your life. "Though an army besiege me," says David, "my

heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident" (Psalm 27:3). David's confidence was not in the absence of darkness, but in the character of the one who watched over him in the dark. "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13).

Though we struggle when God seems far off, we need not be without hope. The risen Christ is still today the certainty of God's nearness and the promise of his care—in the dark.

With love,
Mike

* Mike Tucker is the speaker/director of Faith for Today.

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Faith Moment

June 30, 2014