

[A sermon of Dr. Gordon H. Clark, first preached on October 15, 1922 when he was just 20 years of age.]

ALWAYS EVERYWHERE!

Ps. 139:1-13 Acts 17:24-28

Text. Phil. 4:5

A man once asked a small boy where God was. I will give you an orange, he said, if you will tell me where God is. The boy thought a moment and then replied, Well I will give you two if you tell me where he isn't. And that reminds me of a catechism question that I learned when I was in the primary department of our Sunday school. It asked, Where is God? And the answer was, God is everywhere. So with that thought in mind, I take as a text Phil. 4:5. "The Lord is at hand." For that is just what the text means. The Lord is near, he is by our side; The Lord is at hand.

Now the peculiar thing about this text is that it is true no matter where and no matter when you say it. The Lord is at hand,

From Greenland's icy mountains
To India's coral strand

The presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ is a glorious reality. To state it philosophically we say, God is everywhere. To put it so that it means something to us personally, we repeat, the Lord is at hand.

But is it not a rather wonderful thing that a person can be in all places at the same time. With us it is not so. We are now here in church, and while here we cannot be in our homes. Incidentally, when we stay at home, or go somewhere else, we cannot be in church. It is a good thing to remember this on Sunday evening. We cannot be in two places at one time. Yet God is everywhere. What reaction do you have to that thought? Certainly he must be a great God. Well, he is a great God. You see this pulpit here, made of good wood in a suitable style. Now if I give the necessary wood, the right quantity and the right quality, to a skillful worker, he can make another pulpit quite like this one. But he could not make the wood. Or take this silver pencil. A competent silversmith, if I gave him the silver, could make a perfect imitation of this pencil. But he could not make the silver. But this great God who is Always Everywhere, he can make the wood itself, he can make the silver.

As it is said by John the beloved of our Lord, "All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made." Not only did he make the wood and the silver, He it is that made the man who works in the wood or the silver. It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. By his fiat he brought the world into being. By the word of his power were the heavens made and all that is therein. Tonight, if it is as clear, look up to the skies. See those twinkling lights of the celestial sphere. Try to remember any facts you may have heard about

them. Recall their immensity. One of them would stretch from the sun past the earth and as far again in the other direction. Then think of the far greater interstellar distances. If you could travel around the earth seven and a half times a second, it would take you hundreds of years to reach some of the stars you see. Consider the mathematical accuracy with which they swing around their orbits, ponder on their glory and strive to realize the meaning of, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

God is everywhere. How can we escape that conclusion? Permit me to take you in imagination to a far off country, a trip to fairy land. We will cross high mountains, and wide seas. We will travel over vast plains and burning deserts. At last we come to a palatial residence. As we walk up the steps the massive bronze doors open before us. We enter. No one is in sight. The dwelling is uninhabited. As we go from room to room other doors, moved by invisible hands open and close. We finally come to a room where a dinner is set before us. As we finish one course, the dishes are taken away and the next course is brought to us. Music is in the air. And yet we see no one. But you would say to yourself, there must be some cause for all this. You might say, why this is a haunted house.

Very well, call it haunted. But look at this world in which we live. See our earth, the moon and planets roll 'round the sun in mechanical precision. Look, the world is haunted by the eternal Spirit of God. In the far off Pleiades, and right in this room, everywhere God is present. The Lord is at hand.

There are those however who, while they can say God is everywhere, cannot say the Lord is at hand. They seem to understand the general statement of God's omnipresence, but fail to understand sometimes the particular case of The Lord is at hand. They will agree with you philosophically, but are apparently unable to apply their principles practically. They are like all men who, knowing they are going to die, deliberately refuse to believe it. Shall we not attempt to do better than that? Let us see if we cannot understand this phrase of Paul's, The Lord is at hand. It simply means that the Lord Jesus Christ is near us, by our sides, at hand. Immediately then the Christian feels the inspiration of the Master's presence. When we come to realize that our Lord is at hand, how differently we will act.

Suppose we begin right now to apply this truth to ourselves. The Lord is at hand. Well, where are we? We are right here in this church. Then he too is here with us. Recall the words he spoke while he was here among men. Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them. We call this a church, the house of God. And while God is everywhere in his essence, he is present in his sanctuary in an especial manner. Wherever people gather together to worship him there he is with them in a peculiar manner. This special presence means that God is especially willing to hear and to answer our prayers, especially willing to accept our praise and worship. Not that he is any less willing to hear our private devotions, not that he wants any less our secret supplications, but that in addition to these he has required us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together to worship him.

It makes no difference whether it is on the heathered hills of Scotland, or in the catacombs of Rome, or in the magnificent cathedrals of France and Italy. It makes no difference whether there are gathered together two or three, or two or three thousand, there he is in the midst of them. And

because this evening God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Ghost, is in this room and present in this service, should we not be very reverent in the presence of the Triune God.

There is an older minister in this city whom I admire very much. And while I am very ready to listen to the advice of anyone who can help me in the ministry, I was especially pleased to listen to what this man had to say. He himself had gotten this piece of advice from an old minister in Scotland and was passing it on to me. It is good advice for a young preacher, but I think also that it is not out of place in the minds of the congregation. For it has its message for pulpit and pew alike. So the minister told me - Always remember that The King is in the audience!

Yet when this service will be ended and we go to our homes, we do not leave the King behind in the auditorium. We leave the house of worship but we do not go out of God's presence. He is always at hand. God is always everywhere. Just as surely as he is with us now, so surely is he with us in our everyday life. And we will do well to be reverent then as well. To remember then that the Lord is at hand will be a great and good influence in our lives.

One summer morning, a wealthy family in their summer residence, arose to find that thru the night the house had been ransacked by thieves. Things were topsy-turvy. The table that stood in the middle of the living room downstairs had been pushed to the wall for the evident purpose of depositing in the middle of the floor all the booty that was being collected from the different parts of the house. There they assembled their loot to pack perhaps before they made their expeditious get-away. But that was not so strange. What was strange was that a picture on the wall had been turned about so that only the back was seen. And as we turn the picture face about there is revealed that exquisite figure of Guido's Ecce Homo. It would seem that the burglar while at his work had been arrested by that face and found it impossible to go on as long as Christ was looking at him. So he turned the face of Christ to the wall.

How foolish it was to think that by turning a picture to the wall he could shut the eye of the all-seeing God. And we are no less reprehensible if we figuratively efface the picture of Christ from our conscience that we may more comfortably continue to do what we should not do.

Some of you may know a man, or at least you can easily imagine one who will send a child out of his sight that he may do some wrong – just as if the eye of the child were more terrible than that of him who sitteth in the heavens. If you must sin, if you must do what is wrong, if you want to do that which you want no one to see, then take the advice of Jeremy Taylor. "Retire yourself wisely and go where God cannot see, for nowhere else will you be safe."

Some missionaries were teaching the natives of South America this lesson, that the Lord is at hand and can see and know all that is done. They listened and at length made reply thru a spokesman. We do not choose your God, they said. We do not want such a sharp-sighted God. We prefer to roam about our forests free from any such observation. It is sad, they had no real choice. Their only choice was whether they would acknowledge the living and true God and do his will, or whether they would continue to disobey him. And that too is the only choice that we can make.

God is in our everyday life whether we want him there or not. He observes our goings out and our comings in. We may know or we may not know that he is there, but nevertheless he is at hand. Permit an illustration.

Go back in your memories a few years if you please to the time that you sat in that school room under the teacher whom you either loved or hated. Recall all your playmates. Many pleasant scenes will flash into your minds and maybe some that are not so pleasant. Well, do you remember one day, the teacher went out of the room. And how did the pupils behave. The boys began to throw chalk and bang board-rubbers around. The girls, well I am not quite so familiar with what the girls do on such occasions. At any rate there was general disorder. Then in the midst of the noise and confusion the teacher entered and quietly stood by the door, unobserved but observing. Then just as one boy is about to heave a board-rubber clean across the room, he catches a glimpse of something in the corner of his eye. His arm half drops, he edges over to his seat, looks very foolish, sits down and begins to study. Another boy sees him and wonders if he is sick, and by intuition looks around to see if there is a reason. He sees the reason standing in the doorway looking on. He too then edges to his seat, he too looks very foolish, sits down and begins to study.

Well the school of which I am speaking is the world we live in. That school is this church. And we are the pupils. God is nearby, at the door so to speak, watching us. Some of us know that he is watching, some of us love him and are trying to do his will. Others do not know and are not trying. They are still shooting the spitballs of sin and hurling the board-rubbers of crime.

Which are you doing? Do you know that the Lord is at hand? Or have you not yet found it out? Have you started studying your lessons, or are you still throwing chalk?

The Lord is at hand. To the chalk-thrower this is a fearful statement. It fills him with terror. It is a most disagreeable statement, for it means being kept after school. But to the one who is studying, to the Christian, the statement brings overflowing inspiration. It brings consolation in trouble, it makes happiness sweeter. The Lord is at hand. With this thought the common tasks of life shine with a new glory because he is by our side. The mother, sewing buttons on the boy's coat or washing supper dishes, the father sweating in the shop or confined to the office, knowing the Lord is at hand almost begins to see God. We almost begin to see God in the common tasks of life.

There was a boy about twelve years old who wanted to see God. One day he asked his father if anyone could see God. The father was perhaps not as sensitive as the shy son and gruffly answered, No. This hurt the lad, but he said nothing. He went out to the fields and woods, for they lived in the country, and watched the flowers and the birds, and thought that the God that made them all ought to be seen somewhere. So he longed to see God. One day the family was to have the minister to dinner. Now thought the boy, here is my opportunity. Sure enough, after dinner the minister had a few moments by himself in the parlor. The youngster crept quietly and respectfully in, and asked, Sir, Can we see God? The man answered with a verse of Scripture, No man can see God and live. This hurt the boy exceedingly. His fondest hope was shattered. He went again to the woods and cried, for his disappointment was great.

Not long after, the boy fell in with a fisherman who fished in the river which ran by not so far from the house. And many an afternoon he spent with this old man in his boat on the river. The parents were somewhat solicitous about their child's welfare, they wanted to know what kind of a man their boy was associating with. It is well that parents should know this, though it has been charged recently that the parents have been negligent in their duties. These parents asked the boy what sort of man this fisherman was. What does he talk about? Well, said the boy, He doesn't talk much at all. But sometimes at sunset, after he has pulled in the lines and we are just drifting, I've seen a tear trickle down his face as he watches the sun go down. The parents evidently thought he man was all right, for the boy continued to go with the old fisherman.

One afternoon, when the lines had been pulled in and they were simply drifting, the boy was watching the old man as he gazed into the low descending sun. He trembled a moment, he hesitated. Should he or should he not? Then suddenly spurring up his courage, he leaned forward and earnestly asked the man, Sir, I promised myself never to ask this question of anyone again, but will you tell me please, can you see God? The old man sat as if he had not heard. His eyes were fixed on that ball of gold as it sank beneath the western horizon. The boy leaned forward again, and more earnestly asked, Tell me sir, can you see God? But the old man never moved a muscle. Intent on the flaming fire as it was being extinguished by the advancing evening, he sat still and gave no sign that the boy had spoken. Then the third time, Tell me please, said the boy and he shook the old man by the sleeve, tell me, can you see God?

And slowly, as a tear began to trickle down the face lighted by the last rays of the departing day, slowly he replied, Sonny, it's gettin' so I can't see anything else.

O Lord God and Heavenly Father, thou art a God at hand and not a God afar off.
Can any man hide himself in the secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord.

Do I Not fill heaven and earth?

O Lord thou art ever near.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me.

We thank thee O Lord for this thy guiding and protecting presence.
Yet not only for thy all-pervading essence but also for thine indwelling presence do we praise thee.

We rejoice that thou thru the Holy Spirit dost form Christ in us and thus we are filled in all the fullness of God.

But who can comprehend thy teachings.

For thou art God.

To thee be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

Amen.

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord God of Hosts.

This is our prayer of rejoicing as we come before Thee to offer our worship.
We exclaim with the Psalmist that a day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.
All thru the week do we look forward to the assembling of ourselves together in thy name.

To bow down before thee, to hear the preached word, to sing thy praises, to be in the
congregation of Christians is joy indeed.
Day of all the week blest, Emblem of eternal rest – if heaven is an eternity of perfect Sabbaths,
how happy are they who have preceded us there and how gloriously content will we be in our
everlasting rest.

We give thee thanks for all things, the worship of the Lord's Day and the eternal rest of which it
is the emblem.

Then, having given thanks, we pray, as directed by the apostles, for kings and for all who are in
authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
O Lord, the more we read of international affairs, the more we see the need of thy directing
influence.

And next, because it is so near and dear to us, we pray for the welfare of this church.
Strengthen the pastor in his labors, and encourage the people thru joy and sorrow.
Pour down a bounteous blessing on this congregation.
Thou art ever willing to bless.
Bless us then, we ask thee, in Christ's name,
Amen.