

Community Church of Issaquah

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I'm Here, I Promise

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A couple of years ago, I remember telling you this story that I read in the news media. It has been planted in my brain and I hope it never goes away. It is as important today as it was then. There was an automobile accident in which a woman was trapped in her overturned car along a seldom travelled road. A man driving behind her saw the accident and stopped to help her. He called 911 but it would take a while for them to get there. So, he crawled under the car and began to talk to the woman inside, assuring her that help was on the way. Her plea was made in loud sobs, "Please don't leave me!"

"What can I do?" he asked. "Nothing" she said. "Just stay with me. Please don't leave." He clasped her hand and promised that he would stay right with her until help came. And for two hours he lay there under the car, holding her hand, and gently talking to her. When the paramedics and firefighters finally arrived, they had to cut her out of the car to free her. The man stayed, holding her hand, until she was loaded into the ambulance and driven away. When someone asked him about it, all he had to say is, "I didn't do anything. I was just there."

"I'm here, I promise." The woman was blessed to have someone willing to be there for her. Unfortunately, life is not like that for every person. I read a sad story about a mother and daughter who were both seriously ill. The

mother called 911 and asked them to send an ambulance, but for some reason, that never happened. The mother died a few hours later and her disabled toddler daughter died alone in the house days later. Their bodies were not found for more than four weeks. There was no one to say, “I’m here, I promise.” Nor to be there for them.

Think about the nurse who spent his days off in the NICU unit holding dying infants who had no family. When the pediatrician asked him why he did that, his response was that he just wanted to be there so that when the child took a final breath, someone was there for them. “I’m here, I promise.” These are just some examples about the concept of being present or not for others. They are stories about other people, so let me tell you one about me. Imagine sitting in a surgery unit’s waiting room waiting for news of your husband’s emergency heart surgery. After nine and a half hours, the surgeon comes out to tell you what happened and tells you that it’s not likely that he will wake up. But for 5 weeks while he’s in a medically induced coma I sit in his room for hours each day just to be there. And when he woke up, his first question is, “Have you been here the whole time?” And my only reply was, “I’m here, I promise.” That has been my solid promise to him for the 22 years of medical crises we have faced since that first surgery. Yes, I’m here, I promise.

The Scripture story today about a time when Jesus was called on to heal someone is one of my favorites. It’s touching that Jesus used his healing powers to help someone change his life in ways he had only hoped for. That’s beautiful, but there’s a part of the story that means

more to me than that healing portion. Here's a man who is paralyzed and unable to do anything for himself. Sadly, he was in a place where he totally relied on the help of friends. And then what happened? Let me tell you.

Jesus had a reputation for performing miracles and for being a profound teacher about how lives can be changed. Four friends of the paralyzed fellow must have heard about Jesus being nearby and were motivated to take some drastic action for their friend. Putting the paralyzed man on a mat, they carried him to the home where Jesus was teaching and speaking. Imagine their disappointment when there were so many people there that they could not get up the stairs to where Jesus was. The doors were blocked by the crowd. Not being deterred, they came up with another plan. Carrying their friend to the roof, they tore a hole in the ceiling and then lowered him down where he landed at the feet of Jesus. Now the beautiful part of this parable: When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." And after an exchange or reasons for Jesus healing him, Jesus said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home."

Did you get the core of why I love this story? Jesus saw their faith. The faith of the men who were there to support and care for the paralyzed friend. Too often we turn our attention to the healing portion of the passage and overlook the importance even Christ saw in having others there to care and support us. The four friends were present for someone. That's what I love best about this story. I have an image in my mind of the four men leaping down the stairs and skipping home with their previously paralyzed

friend, all rejoicing and thrilled at the new way of life they all would have. Each of them able to say “I’m here, I promise.”

I don’t think we engage in the acts of being present with the intent of getting something out of it for ourselves. Yet, there are always rewards for that kind of deed – some are silent, others are not so. Our reward for being present for someone may be only an inner joy and satisfaction of simply doing the loving thing. The Buddha said, “If you must choose between the right thing and the compassionate thing, always choose the compassionate thing.”

There’s another story from the Gospel of John that has an important message for us as well. In the city of Jerusalem, there are several gates to enter the city. Near the Sheep’s Gate there was a pool with five porches called Bethesda. On these porches lay many sick people. Some were blind, some were sick, some couldn’t move at all. Tradition said that the first person into the pool when the waters moved would be healed. One day Jesus went by the pool at Bethesda and saw a man lying there on one porch.

Jesus asked him, “Would you like to be healed?” That seemed an unkind thing to say, something like, “Don’t you really want to be healed?” Of course, the man did, but there was a problem. The sick man said to Jesus, “Sir, I have no one to put me in the pool when the water is moving. While I am coming, another one gets in first.” Jesus’s response was to say to him, “Get up! Pick up your

bed and walk.” Then miracle of miracles, the man was healed, picked up his bed and walked away.

Two healing stories of two men whose encounters with Jesus led to new life. But these two stories are different because of one thing – one man had friends present, the other man had no one to be present for him. The outcome was the same for both men, yet their stories have had a very deep impact on me and my ministry. I am well aware that there will be many times when I will not know what to say or what to do to bring comfort to a difficult situation. But I can be present for others. How often I could say, “I didn’t do anything. I was just there.” The most assuring and hopeful promise of presence is found in the verses shared this morning from the last words of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus said to his followers, “Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of time.” That is a presence we can always depend on.

One way each of us can “be there” for others is through prayer. Each time you do, offer a word of prayer for that individual. This is one strong way to be present for others here in our CCI family. You might also make a phone call, send a card, or make a visit. There are many ways to be present. Our work is to make it happen. How important it is to hear or to say, “I’m here for you, I promise.” It can be life changing.

There is power in one person doing one thing. Even if you don’t know the right words to say or the right thing to do, just be present. Be there. That alone can be your gift to the someone – to all of us. You matter. You must never

forget that. We count on your being present in our lives and we want to be present in yours. Is there someone today to whom you would like to say, "I'm here, I promise?" Let me give you a minute to think about that and perhaps make a plan to help it happen. For sure, each one of us wants to hear those words from someone. But if no human is saying them to you, let me share in closing what Jesus says, "And lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the earth.?"

That's Jesus's way of say, "I'm here, I promise."