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Dr. Gregory S. Neal, Senior Pastor

The Celebration Times

"Celebrating the Real Presence of Jesus in our lives."

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Seagoville's First
United Methodist
Church

Holy Presence

By: Dr. Gregory S. Neal

"I will never leave you or forsake you."
-Hebrews 13:5c

I was standing at the Western Wall in Jerusalem when I felt it. It began like a shallow wave across the surface of pool, but as I reached out my hand and touched the cold, hard stones that shallow wave became a surge, an overwhelming flood which rushed my spiritual senses and washed over me with cascades of all-encompassing, life transforming peace. It was one of the most powerful experiences of God's holy presence that I have ever had. Standing there, with my hand resting upon the ancient stones making up the last remnants of the Second Temple, I had absolutely no doubt that I was being touched by Almighty God.

It's not as if this were a new or foreign experience for me.

Throughout my life, like many Christians, I have had moments in which I knew that I was in the immediate presence of the Creator. It has happened at times when one would normally expect it, such as when I knelt before Bishop Blake, he placed his hands on my head, and I was ordained a Presbyter. It has happened at high, holy moments of worship and in times of private prayer and meditation. It has also happened when one least expects it, but often most needs it: at difficult moments in the midst of hospital calls, while struggling for words when counseling someone and even while trying to fight one's way through the insanity of afternoon traffic. And, then, there are those glorious times when I have found myself in the real presence of God as I have been witness to the glorious beauty of creation from the deck of a ship or while standing in my back yard gazing through my telescope at some celestial sight. The experience of being in the real presence of Christ is not foreign to me, nor am I necessarily surprised when I feel it, and this was



particularly true while standing at the base of the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

This is the holiest site in modern Judaism. It is the closest that Jews can come, today, to the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple. The stones that make up the Western Wall are a continual, historic and spiritual reminder of the connection that exists between the children of Israel and the land, walls, and Temple Mount which make up the Old City of Jerusalem. Their very presence serve as a reminder that they, as a people, belong in Jerusalem; despite what politicians might say, this is an incontrovertible truth.

I was standing at the Western Wall amid the press and noisy den of hundreds of praying Jews. It was the Sabbath day and the site was jammed packed with people, all of whom had one objective: making their way up to the wall and praying. I was just one

gentile among the crowd, and yet there was no pressure to keep me away. I had wormed my way through the mass of people and, here I stood, my hand on the wall, being literally encompassed by the real presence of Christ Jesus my Lord. It was an amazing, soul-fulfilling experience. I stood there for a few moments, allowing that inner sense to rage through me. And, then, I began to pray. In accordance with longstanding tradition, I had brought with me some slips of paper with the names and concerns of others written upon them; as I prayed I committed those people and their needs to God by placing these slips of paper into the cracks of the Wall. And I knew *I knew* that God had not only heard my prayer but that those people, and their many varied needs, were as much in the immediate presence of God as I was at that moment.

And then, at that very moment, the words quoted above from Hebrews 13:5 went ringing through my head: "I will never leave you or forsake you." God has said these same words to many in the past, and now he was saying them to me. No matter where I am, no matter what God calls me to do, I know that I will never be alone. He will go with me. And God makes that same promise to us all.

Greg

MISSIONS

“...inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Matthew 25:40

At this writing the Breadbasket shelves are bare except for some tuna, rice and spaghetti, The five freezers are empty except for bread and a few sweets. We are so thankful for you folks at FUMC for the various items contributed each week which helps us to have a little more to give than rice and tuna. We hope you will note what to bring each Sunday and will give as you are able. The Boy Scout Food Drive will be Saturday, February 10th. Please give generously so we will be able to restock the Breadbasket shelves. As of this writing we are still without funds from the North Texas Methodist Conference and are not getting any orders from the Food Bank. We especially thank those who have given a financial gift to help purchase food. We are still unable to take new applications but we never turn anyone away without giving them something even if it's only a bag of rice and a can of tuna. We are so reminded of the above scripture as we share with the needy folks of our community. We hope you'll also be reminded of the above scripture as you share with the Breadbasket.

Dalton's mishap and the wintry weather has kept us house bound for most of the month. However, Dalton was able to make some phone calls to some of our folks who are not coming to church. We also made a few visits to Mrs. Juanita after another stay in the hospital. She is such a joy to our lives. We are so thankful for Martha and Ray who are Mrs. Juanita's Caregivers.

Thanks to Sarah for helping us with the Ministry at Seago Manor. Our attendance was low in January but everyone seem to enjoy Dalton's Christmas message. He spoke on the beauty of a Christmas Tree and that the lights represents Jesus, the light of the world. He stated that Christmas is a time of loving, giving, and sharing. He added that we need to experience Christmas every day and not just in the month of December. We invite you to help us at Seago Manor each 3rd Sunday. We desperately need a Song Leader and Speakers to bring the message. Pastor Greg has designated 2007 as a **Year to Proclaim Jesus**. Please help us to proclaim Jesus through the Breadbasket, Seago Manor, Waterford, and Shut-Ins, as well as those folks without Christ who lives in our city.

In His Name, Dalton & Billie

THE TOP TEN PREDICTIONS FOR 2007

1. The Bible will still have the answers.
2. Prayer will still work.
3. The Holy Spirit will still move.
4. God will still inhabit the praises of His people.
5. There will still be God-anointed preaching.
6. There will still be singing of praise.
7. God will still pour out blessings upon His people.
8. There will still be room at the Cross.
9. Jesus will still love you.
10. Jesus will still save the lost.