# “I Am With You”

By Ken Woodley  Sermon for St. Anne’s Episcopal Church 9/6/26

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,” Jesus tells the disciples.

That is such a very comforting thought.

But what about each of us in our lonely moments?

What about those who live alone every day and night?

There is no way I believe that Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit leave any of us to our loneliness. There is no chance we are abandoned by the Lord and are made to feel even greater loneliness and isolation.

The world can make us feel that way. The world can make us all feel that way. But not Jesus. Never Jesus.

Some of our most profound moments of personal epiphany, after all, can and do come when there is nobody else around.

Nobody, that is, but Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit.

History is filled with women and men who go off to live apart from society in the pursuit of spiritual fulfillment. The Desert Mothers and Fathers of early Christianity are known for their profound revelations and insights, for example.

But the words of Jesus seem to imply we’ve got to grab one or two people to feel any spiritual connection.

Context is important here.

Jesus spoke those words to his closest followers. He knew they would soon be traumatically alone in the wake of his imminent crucifixion. He was throwing them a spiritual flotation device to keep them from drowning in sorrow.

Just as he is speaking today to small congregations like ours, left without a priest and sailing our church across the Sea of Galilee all by ourselves.

Surely, the Holy Spirit of Jesus is with us today, just as he always is when two or more are gathered here in his name.
Or when just one of us comes here alone to pray.

But I also believe that Jesus is encouraging his disciples—then and now—to find spiritual and emotional comfort in the companionship of others. And not for the first time.

Jesus always made certain that when he sent his disciples out on their own to declare the Kingdom of Heaven was near, he sent them out in pairs. He did not send them out on that daunting mission alone.

Jesus doesn't send us out alone, either.

Jesus knew all about being alone. Those 40 days in the desert following his baptism taught him the absolute length and breadth and the depth of being wrapped up in aloneness.

Too much aloneness can can ensnare us in a kind of emotional and spiritual darkness. We aren't tempted by Satan, as Jesus was, but we can encounter our own demons.

We fall too easily prey to anxiety, fear and doubt. Obstacles along the way can seem insurmountable.

Jesus is encouraging us to open our hearts to fellowship and companionship as we journey through life. The *strength* of that fellowship allows us to embrace moments of solitude with our souls wide open to the love of God.

The Holy Spirit of Jesus and the love and grace of God *do* come to us in moments of solitude when we are able to turn down and tune out the world's static.

Jesus would often go off to be alone, to find that special oneness with God, centering himself and re-gathering his spiritual, emotional and physical strength.

When that happened up on the Galilean hills and mountains, Jesus was anything but alone.

And that begs a crucial question: is any follower of Jesus ever really alone?

No, we are not.

Even if we are the only one in the house.

On two different occasions in the Gospel of John Jesus explains why this is true.

"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you," Jesus declares in the 20th verse of the 14th chapter.

And in chapter 17, verse 21, Jesus prays these words to God: "…Just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us…"

So…….even when we are absolutely alone we are absolutely not alone.

Wherever we may be there are always two or more gathered in his name. The Holy Spirit of Jesus and of God within us makes three together.

Jesus is therefore among us always.

As is the Holy Spirit of God.

Keeping a promise on the brightest of days.
And the darkest of nights.

AMEN