



“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Who would have thought how such words would serve as incredible news these last few months as we wondered just how safe it would be for crowds of 50 or 100, or even 10, for that matter. Evidently, two or three still brings in a fair share of Jesus, too. Come to think of it, it is often in those 2 or 3 people moments that a fair share of faith-shaping takes place that we wouldn’t give up for anything.

Yes, there remains a considerable warming of our hearts, in a sense, to see more and more people gathered for public worship when it comes to Christmas or Easter, for instance, but sometimes it takes the personal conversations between one another

to take on a deeper level of appreciation of all that *is* said in a larger gathering for worship or a group Bible study. Sometimes it takes the sharing of meaningful stories with two or three people to fully consider the possibility that the Good News story shared with however many scores of worshipers, is, indeed, meant for that individual child of God as well.

I still remember the largest gathering for a funeral I have ever been a part of: one of those that required the busting out of the folding chairs from the fellowship hall to fill the narthex hallway behind the sanctuary. A teenage girl had died, and she was from one of those families that seemed to take up half the whole population of the town, not to mention all the classmates and youth group and members of the church. That was an awe-inspiring moment to stand in front of all those people, not knowing so many of them, and yet who cared so deeply for the one they lost far, far too soon. But, again, sometimes the most powerful moments of faith-shaping happen not while in the mass sea of humanity, but in the moments of just two or three people, as if there is as much Christ there as anywhere else.

One of the people in that filled-to-the-brim sanctuary was the aunt of the deceased. She was a member of the congregation; not necessarily a frequent worship attendee, but always seemed a little distant when she was there with her daughter, who was several years younger than her cousin, who died. A few weeks after the funeral, the aunt called, wanting to talk about something, but I had no idea what about. And I assumed she wanted to meet in my office, where most conversations tend to happen of a personal nature, but no, she wanted to stay outside.

Who knows? Maybe she wasn’t ready to walk by the very sanctuary where the funeral was held for her beloved niece. Oftentimes, for many children of God, funerals serve as a jumping-off point to consider personal matters of life and faith that they may not have before. Losing her niece made her think of her own daughter: whether or not she, as a single mom, was doing enough for her. But what made the 2 or 3-person moment all the more heart-wrenching, that could not possibly have happened in a mass sea of humanity: she wondered if God could ever love her. Evidently, her past made her convinced that God could not possibly care for her anymore.

Sometimes, it takes a 2 or 3 persons moment to hear the Gospel on a more personal level, as if when we are in a large group worship the Good News floats from the pulpit and hits the majority of worshipers, but there’s still that humanity to us that wonders if it’s meant for me, too. She wasn’t sure if God could ever be for her. It didn’t have to be me to tell her; it could have

been anyone to reinforce the most authentic reality of this world that absolutely nothing you could ever do can make God stop loving you.

And that 2 or 3 person moment is by no means limited to right after worship on a Sunday morning, or a church building meeting room, or right outside the walls in a parking lot; the 2 or 3 person moments happen in a family home, too, when a mom and daughter share the pain and anguish over losing a most valuable treasure in their family, and the strength they build off of one another to move forward. There is just as much Jesus in those moments as a congregation member and a pastor just outside the entrance doors to the church building. Soon enough, the aunt became a far more frequent worshiper on Sunday mornings with a more engaging smile, her daughter a frequent participant in the children's sermon, but I still have a feeling that even greater Resurrection power emerged when it was just the two of them in the car, or at their home, or being picked up right after school. Those incredibly meaningful 2 or 3 person moments have a way of spiritually feeding the rest of our life.

And yes, sometimes it takes those more personal engaging moments to realize something else about this Lord of ours: it, actually, only takes one, for God to be Emmanuel, still. Even when we are alone, even when we struggle to find someone to ask the question if we are worthy of the universal Gospel, and even at death: Christ remains insistent to be with us from the beginning to the end, with all the doubts and fears in between and through all eternity. Absolutely nothing that we can do can separate us from that mind-boggling love in Christ, Jesus our Lord. Yes, that Great News, is meant for you, too. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!