

From the Rector's Study ~

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder" as the familiar saying goes. One misses a friend or loved one all the more when that person is not present. Sometimes, we don't even realize how much the other person means to us until we experience his or her absence. This is important for you and me to recognize and is especially important for the community of Christians, for this community of ECR. When you are here, it may seem on rare occasion that the rest of us are taking for granted that fact that you are present. However, you need to know that when you are not here, you are missed, missed very much. And there's something also that you yourself are missing in being away, in not being here at ECR.

I am here every Sunday. True, someone may say, I get paid to be here. But it's also true that when I'm away on vacation, I miss being here and my heart grows fonder for you and all this community. It's also true that when a parishioner is missing from worship and fellowship, especially on Sunday mornings, his or her absence makes a difference in the lives of many people. It's not just my presence as rector that makes ECR the community that it is. In fact, my presence cannot determine this community. Yours can. Yours does. And so does the presence or absence of every other person of this community. So, I'm inviting and urging all of us at ECR to make a decided commitment to being here on Sunday's regularly even more than usual; to be here 'religiously!'

When I was a member in the pew, I did not realize for a long time, I think, that my presence or my absence made an impact on others. I thought I was more anonymous than I actually was. You may think the same thing about yourself and your family. The truth, though, is that when I didn't show up on a given Sunday (and I tended to show quite regularly, so it was an unusual Sunday that found me remaining at home instead of going to church) I could not tell that my absence added to the impact of the absences of others on that same day. I didn't realize, I didn't stop to think about it, that I was not the only one who was going to be away instead of among my community that particular Sunday. The cumulative effect, especially upon a community that was smaller rather than larger, was far more than I wanted to admit.

My absence only added to the discouragement of others of my community. And the vacancies in the pews certainly confused, if not discouraged, any guests or visitors on that day. 'Where are the people?' they would wonder. 'Does anybody go here? What's wrong with this community?'

In contrast, when I come to church my presence makes a positive difference to the others of my community. The same is true for you. Especially at this remarkable community of ECR, because of who we are and how we do things, you are celebrated when you come. This is true whether you come every week or only at Christmas and Easter. Don't think so? Come more frequently and this community will prove it to you. Summer is fast approaching and people, including me, will be migrating off to vacations. In the meantime, though, we're here in town and, for the sake of others here, we need to be here.

In addition, for the sake of yourself, you need to be here. For my own sake, I need to be here. For the personal good that each of us gains, we need to be here. And for the pleasure and blessing that we offer back to God in return for blessings received, we need to be here. Are you blessed outside of church? Of course. But are you blessed inside church, too? Of course! Can you pray to God and worship God outside of church? Of course. But that just means that you can pray to God and worship God from inside church, too.

And the blessing that each of us gains in being together are simply not found elsewhere. And this is God's intention. I get a blessing, or someone else is blessed, when you are here. It is a blessing that comes only through you. You really do have that much power within you, to provide blessing that no one else can provide. Similarly, you are blessed when you are here in a way that someone here, and only that person uniquely, is able to provide you,. Again, test the theory: come more regularly and find out how true this is.

Certainly regular attendance at worship is an expectation for Christian leaders, like the Vestry and our Ministry Leaders. But it is also an expectation for every Christian. And being Episcopalians, collective worship is a defining value of who we are and how we 'do Church.'

So, know this: you make a difference when you are not here, so make a better difference by being here, instead. Come be an example. Be a blessing. Come be blessed, and enjoy the amazing inspiring examples around you in this community. Come find out that presence make the spirit stronger.

God's Peace.

Jim +