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AKA: Emmanuel
West Valley Presbyterian Church
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Yesterday I was watching Jonathan hit some baseballs up in Campbell. It was a special clinic , and there were a bunch of parents and coaches milling around.

I was engrossed in reading something on my cell phone when I saw Jonathan motioning to me out of the corner of my eye.

I went over to him...

"Mom," he said. "The guy that's sitting next to you...Do you know who that is? No, I said. I didn't even know there was anyone sitting next to me. Mom...that's Dusty Baker."

I looked, and behold, there he was. He had his son with him and was sitting there watching him hit.

I went back and I claimed my seat right next to him. I felt so different. I was in the presence of greatness. This was awesome.

I smiled at him. He smiled back at me. I couldn't believe it.

Then the head coach came over and started talking to him and I was kind of in the conversation. Dusty turned and looked at me as he was talking, and I didn't have a clue what they were talking about and so I just smiled and nodded and acted like I knew everything about baseball that there was to know.

If you are interested, Dusty Baker is a really nice guy.

But later I got to thinking...here I was right next to a legend...and I had no idea! I wouldn't have had a clue that I was in the presence of greatness if Jonathan hadn't pointed it out to me.

I would have left that place without any sense of awe or joy! I would have missed the whole thing.

Now...

Christmas is the greatest love story ever written

Christmas tells us that

We have a God who *wants* to be with us. He isn't forced to be with us.

He *wants* to be with us.

His name "**Immanuel**" means "**God is with us**"

But often we don't realize how close he is to us

How very available and ready to respond

We might say we know that God is with us, but really, a lot of times we act like he's not even there...we don't realize how much he wants to be included in our everyday affairs...

Ever want to be with someone so much that you ache for them?

Sometimes people in love who are separated by distance know this kind of ache.

Many love songs have been written about this longing...this desire to be with the one you can't stop thinking about

The one you want to be with...absorbs your thinking

And you will do anything...anything...to make being with that person happen...

The kind of God we have is an "I want to be with you" God.

A God who aches for connection with you, and me in the same way.

At a youth retreat at Mt Hermon recently and there was a speaker there who talked about God being jealous for us.

The speaker used the analogy with the youth of as much as you are jealous when the girl or boy you love is taken from you by someone you hate, so God is jealous for you when you stray away from him. When you are taken away from him by sin...

We have an "I want to be with you at all costs" kind of God.

And that's what Christmas is all about.

The name "Immanuel" meaning "God with us" was given for Jesus in the OT and repeated in the NT

[Isaiah 7:14](#) prophesies about Jesus and says...

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him **Immanuel**.

[Matthew 1:23](#) reiterates the same prophecy after the angel visits Mary saying this was to fulfill the prophecy...given by Isaiah..

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him **Immanuel**" (which means "God with us").

By the way, anytime you see "el" in scripture, that means God. That **el**

comes from the Hebrew word for God “Elohim”. “Immanu -el” then means God with us. That’s God’s name. We have a “with us” God...

All through scripture we have this God who keeps trying to get a connection with us...

If you are familiar with the book of Genesis the first question God asks Adam and Eve after they have sinned is “Where are you?” implying...you left me...but *I want to be with you.*

One of the last promises for the future is at the end of the Bible is in the book of Revelation, and I read it last week but I want to read it again because I was just struck by the “I want to be with you” longing of God’s heart here....

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “**Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.**” (Revelation 21:3)

Three times God says he wants to be with us in one verse.

Do you get the sense that “Immanuel” (God with us) is a good name for God in Christ?

Some names don’t fit certain things

Like I knew a cat once who was named “Gentile” – which means kind/nice in French

Meanest cat I ever knew...demon possessed

Here kitty...kitty...kitty...(hiss)

But Immanuel, God with us, is a great name...it fits the Divine heart

Do you know **the actual first time God says the words** in scripture “**I am with you**”? Anyone know? – the first time he actually says those words in the Bible– **is the account of Jacob’s ladder** in Genesis.

Jacob had run away from home and it’s a long story so I won’t go into it here. But he is tired and upset and finds a place to lie down and as he sleeps..

Jacob has a dream in which he sees a stairway (KJV “ladder”) resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. *There above it stood the LORD, and He said: 'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac...**I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.**'"*

God sets up this ladder or staircase of connection with earth
And right here in Genesis is the first time he says in scripture the words “I am with you”

Did you maybe learn that song in Sunday School when you were a kid?
We are climbing Jacob’s ladder? Every rung goes higher higher...
Did you notice though that this song is actually wrong if you look at the story in the Bible? Jacob isn’t climbing the ladder. No person is on that ladder...

Rather *angels* are coming down it, and going back up it

It is God’s kingdom that is descending and ascending
It is God’s realm that is bridging the distance between earth and heaven
The gap is not being repaired because *we* are going up and down a ladder
Rather it is repaired because God is bringing his glory down to us
And bringing us back up to him

This is a God- *who wants to be with us* in any way he can – so he sets up a ladder to bridge the gap between us and him...

The reason he gives Jacob this dream, is that Jacob was to be the father of the nation of Israel.

Jacob is actually renamed “Isra-el” – and Israel means “those who wrestle with”...and then you have an “el”...**what does that mean?**

God...

Right...those who wrestle with God. El means God in scripture.

Jacob wrestled with an angel, sort of as a premonition that Israel would wrestle with God

Cause even though God has a ladder – and kept trying to repair that distance between himself and his people by giving them the 10 commandments, telling them how to live...again and again...

The people didn’t necessarily want to be with God; they weren’t nearly as interested in being with God as God was interested in being with them...

They didn't realize how close he was to them – just like I didn't realize I was sitting next to Dusty Baker
They thought God was distant, or didn't care; was aloof or angry and
They became preoccupied with many things
That's sort of the way it is today too
We are anxious and worried about many things. We have all sorts of interests and various things to do, rather than pursuing our relationship with God first.
Rather than saying, "Yes God. I want to be with you too."

But God's name is "Immanuel" – a "with us" kind of God
And he doesn't give up
He's a God with a ladder in Genesis
An "I want to be with you" ladder
An "I want to connect with you" ladder
And Christmas tells us that
... he comes down in the ordinariness of our lives to be with us...

Some of you know that I grew up in faculty housing because my Dad was a professor. I was a faculty brat.
And every year the painters would come and do a room or two and give our house a face lift
And there would be different painters who would come each year
But there was one painter that stayed constant and that I got to know really well
His name was Mr. Mertz – and he always wore a white cap and overalls with paint dots all over them, and he would also always talk to me –
He was head of all the painters and more often than not he was way up high on a ladder somewhere doing the detail work in the corners and on the molding cause he was the best painter of all
We had really high ceilings because the architecture was so old
And I used to have long conversations with Mr Mertz who was always way up on the ladder, when I was about six or seven
I remember straining my neck to look up at him shouting up stupid questions like "Did he like spaghetti?" or "Did he have any pets?" or "Was he the one that had painted the yellow lines down the middle of the street outside?"
He never seemed to get tired of me
One time when I was in an extremely talkative mood though, I saw him lay down his paintbrush.

Then he climbed down the ladder.

“You know,” he said when he got to the bottom. “Your neck must be really sore after looking up at me for so long. And your voice is kind of getting hoarse from talking so loud for so long. Let’s just talk normal for awhile like this, face to face.”

At Christmas that’s exactly what God did

He said to us,

Yes I get it.

There’s a big gap between us – I’m up here. You’re down there.

Its hard for you to see that I love you...that I am with you

So let me come down to you, and let’s talk face to face for awhile...

Let me bridge the gap this time not by angels like on Jacob’s ladder - but by my very presence – Immanuel – God with you..face to face

That’s Christmas...

So if we have this God who aches to be with us, how can we live in response to his taking such initiative on our behalf?

How can we live a “God with me life” where we are responding to him, and letting him in?

How do we live our lives in such a way that we recognize him with us and we say “Yes God. I want to be with you too.”

You don’t turn away from someone who wants to be with you that much, do you? Who is that passionate about having a relationship with you.

You just don’t turn away from that.

Yet we do this to God all the time. We may be completely unaware of it.

But we can shut him out and not even not even recognize his presence ... that’s how much sin has us in its clutches...

We may sing “O Come, O Come Immanuel”, but then run the other direction.

I know Christmas is a busy time. I know that some of you are just exhausted around this season. But I’d like you to try something for this next week of Christmas. I’d like you to try to respond in concrete ways to the God of Christmas...the God of the ladder.

The God who is with us now...who continues to long for a relationship with you and me...who wants to make that connection with us and waits for our response.

To respond to the God of the ladder, isn't that hard. It just takes a little more effort to be conscious of the God who is right here already, recognize him, and become aware of his presence.

So I just want to talk to you a minute about how you can make an ordinary day, an "Immanuel" day...

A God with me now...day

So that Christmas can move from a past historical event that we remember back then, to something that is a reality for you and me right here and now...

So that you can respond with a "Yes" to God's desire to engage with you here in 2012...during this Christmas season

So here are some very practical suggestions on how to respond...to a God who has already climbed down the ladder to us in Jesus...to recognize his presence in our very ordinary days and thereby turn an ordinary day into an Immanuel day...

How To Make An Ordinary Day, An Immanuel Day

1. **At night:** When you go to bed tonight, just think about doing the next day with the God who is already with you. Recognizing him with you a little more...Now I shouldn't really say next day.

Because even though we think of days beginning with the sunrise, the Hebrew people did not. In **the Hebrew world**, they actually **thought of the day as starting the night before**. This is from **Genesis 1. "And there was evening, and there was morning..." notice, "...the first day."** The day doesn't begin with morning; the day begins with evening.

Why does the day start with evening? Well it's a reminder while you sleep, God is running the world. God does not sleep, and God keeps everything going just fine without us. Real quickly, just turn to the person next to you and say, **"The world will do okay when you sleep tonight."**

Okay. So your day responding to "Immanuel – God with us" begins this evening. When you see your pillow, say, **"God, thank You. Thanks that I'm alive. You made this happen, I didn't."** And then just let go...all the burdens, all the worries, all the pressures, all the unanswered questions. Let them go.

If it helps, just have your palms up as

you're laying there in bed, in surrender.

And pray "Thank you that you are with me and can take these things from me." When they all come back, just let them go again.

There's this great quote from the Scriptures. "**When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.**" Why? **For the Lord will be at your side.** "I'll be with you." Again, **Immanuel** – great name for God.

2. In the morning. Ever notice that when you go to bed at night? It's kind of an odd thing. You're just sleeping, lying there doing nothing, but bad things happen to your body and your breath.

In a similar way spiritually, things happen in my mind. Things happen in my will. And I need cleansing, not just for my body, but for my spirit. So while you're brushing your teeth, washing your face, exfoliating whatever you exfoliate, invite the Spirit to be cleansing your soul. Fabulous words from the psalmist, "**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**"

And I'm telling you, just to start the day being cleansed by God is a great way to begin. We can pray...

God, I'd love it if You'd just cleanse me all up spiritually. Would You do that for me God? Because I want to be with you too...Just like you want to be with me.

You have to clean up anyway in the morning. So why not just clean up spiritually too as you do that?

3. When you relate to people. If you are like me the phone usually rings soon after the day begins. People start coming into our lives. And depending on our mood we can either be grumpy in our response or gracious. When your phone rings tomorrow...or it vibrates with a text message...because your phone will do something tomorrow, I guarantee it...just think about answering the person in Jesus' name.

What is that like? What am I talking about? Well, back in the day, there was a Benedictine monk, and in

the Benedictine tradition, hospitality was a big deal.

Often that meant welcoming people to give them lodging and food. Before he welcomed anyone though, this Benedictine monk said a little prayer. He did it in Latin and the prayer was **Benedicamus Domino**. That means "Lord,

send me a pizza."

No, actually it means...

"It may be the Lord." It may be the Lord.

Jesus said, "whatever you've done for one of the least of these, you've done it for me..." Just pause before you answer your phone or your texts because... It may be the Lord.

Wherever you are then, at work, at home, at school... whoever you meet... it may be the Lord.

Sort of an exciting way to live, isn't it? You might encounter Jesus at any moment.

4. When you drive

What would it be like to drive if Jesus was in the car with you?

Might Jesus be a little bit worried? If you think Jesus might be a little bit worried... What would it look like for us to make our car an Immanuel car... a God with us car? Maybe it means sometimes I'm just silent, and I'm talking to God as I'm driving in traffic. Maybe it means sometimes I play music that I

love... maybe it's worship music, maybe it's other kind of music, but it just fills me with joy, and I thank God for it.

Last year, over 35,000 people died in car accidents usually because somebody was in a hurry or somebody was mad. What would it mean if all of our cars were Immanuel cars – God with us cars...

To make our cars places in which I know God is with me, and I am responding to his presence as I drive.

Are you beginning to get what its like to make an ordinary day, an Immanuel day? A God with me day? It's all about recognizing his presence with us and then letting God in to everything we do...One more example..

5. Watching TV

Television is still the number one leisure activity in America.

So if you usually watch TV before you go to bed at night, watch it with the "I want to be with you" God that we've been talking about... Immanuel.

When something

comes on, like a news story, and it prompts a concern in you, let the Lord know about that.

Ask Him to do something to help the people involved. Talk with Him about it.

When you read the newspaper, if you normally read the newspaper or read

news online, go ahead and read.... But just read it with Jesus.
And as you go through it you might say something like, "God, there is a part of the world that really needs You. God, government is in kind of a mess trying to figure out the fiscal crisis that we're in. Would You help us out Lord? Will you bring us some resolve? Help the people who are suffering in CT. Be with those who need food and shelter tonight. Lord thank you for the miracle of our world, and help our world "

Do you see how living an ordinary day, can become an Immanuel day, when we consciously become aware that God is with us?

When we start to respond this way we are saying **"Yes God. I want you to come in and be a part of every area of my life – not just church on Sunday..."**

I want to respond in love to you as you have responded in outrageous love to me...by climbing all the way down the ladder that first Christmas
So we could be together, face to face.

Of course, God's final ladder to repair the breach between us and himself
Was the cross – the final connection between heaven and earth...
And at Christmas we must always remember that God climbed down the ladder to us at Christmas on his *own initiative, fully aware that the cross was imminent*, and a part of the plan from the beginning
Its hard to fathom such love, isn't it?
Immanuel love that has been at the heart of our Divine Creator from the start...

To think that God has such a profound
ache, and longing, and desire to "be with us" that it would drive him to the manger and then to the cross is almost beyond our ability to fully comprehend...that he wants to be with us that much...at all costs?

And yet it's the truth...it's the truth about the very nature of God that he would do this
And name himself Immanuel...so that we would always remember that God himself is with us

The best gift you can give to God this Christmas is to recognize this Immanuel truth; recognize his presence, and let him into your heart, and into every area of your life; so that every day can be an Immanuel day...
By doing this you say to the one who was born for you, who died for you,

“Yes. I want to be with you too.” Amen