

God makes a home

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Jesus' promise that he and God will come make a home with us sounds like good news to me.

Our so-called secular age purports to have disenchanted us of our pre-modern superstitions. Many of us find God's stark absence from our daily affairs to be our most prominent experience of the divine. Like Moses, we merely glimpse the back of a God passing before our eyes, a God whose countenance remains forever out of sight.

To those of us who inhabit such a world, Jesus' words to the disciples sizzle with promise.

These words appear on the brink of Jesus' own departure from this world. He seeks to prepare his followers for what we know all too well will be a long-standing absence.

When Jesus departs, how will this movement survive? With Jesus physically absent, what is left for his followers to do but disband? As a mainline pastor, these questions hit close to home.

The characteristically Johannine response: love. Christ remains present even in his absence, so long as his followers love one another.

When Judas asks how this absent Christ could reveal himself to future generations, Jesus responds with an apparent non sequitur: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." But perhaps loving Jesus and keeping his words are nothing other than the advent of Christ's presence in a community.

In other words, the love that binds Christians together is nothing short of incarnation, a local revelation of the word made flesh. Where this kind of love occurs, there God promises to make a home. Or rather, God already has.

This calls into question the whole presumption of secularity and disenchantment. Isn't our world in fact oozing with Christ's presence? Isn't the Holy Spirit present in every pulpit and every Bible study that reminds us of Christ's commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us? Isn't the God who eludes the scientific gaze of our world revealed in the communal love already binding up the devastated city of Boston?

Secular age or not, God is already making a home in our midst. This week's gospel text reminds us that God's incarnational indwelling is even nearer to us than we think.