

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 1:6-14

John 17:1-11

Left Behind

Today's texts are filled with mystery, questions, confusing answers, promises and commissions. As I began to study them this week I was quickly reminded of how often we miss the good news of the gospel story even when it is right in the midst of us.

I wonder how frustrated Jesus was with his disciples when they asked "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" I wondered if as he was ascending to the sky he thought - I sure hope you get it when the spirit descends upon you, because you certainly aren't getting it now, you still seem to be distracted with unnecessary details.

Honestly Jesus has journeyed with them closely, he has healed, forgiven, taught and ministered, he has even gone as far as dying and rising again and they are still asking "When will the kingdom of God come?"

It is not entirely their fault they are simply following the faithful teaching they have been given all their lives - but somehow even though they have walked intimately with Jesus they have missed the message that we are called to live God's kingdom on earth. Living the way of Jesus is the way the kingdom is brought. "I am the way the truth and the life" he said. We as followers of Jesus are called to make the kingdom present here and now.

I had the gospel of John read to us from "The Message" this morning because the text was easier to hear and I didn't want us to miss it. David Lose wrote "One of the most profound promises of all of Scripture is hidden in this text. It has the power to transform the way we understand the very point of our faith and the very meaning of our lives. But, I'll warn you, it's easy to miss. You have to dig a little, but if you're willing to work you'll not only walk on holy ground but strike a holy pay dirt.

This passage, part of the larger farewell discourses and the opening of the "high priestly prayer" is so theologically dense that it's easy to miss the forest for the trees. All the relational talk about "I am in you and you in me" or "all mine are yours and yours are mine" feels a bit of kilter with our everyday conversational talk. (Frankly, it sounds closer to the *Beatle's* "I Am the Walrus" than it does the sacred Scriptures.) But, in fact, it is everyday conversation for Jesus. Because the relationship Jesus shares with the Father is so intimate, so interpenetrating, that the conversation it elicits is, indeed, foreign to us. Jesus shares in God's very being and existence. What's amazing

is that this is precisely what he's inviting us to share as well. Jesus, that is, invites us to know and be known by the God who no one has seen (John 1:18)."¹

As Jesus departs from us we are not 'Left Behind' to live in fear of his next coming. We are left here to live out the kingdom of God. We are here that we might "Love the Lord our God with all our heart soul and mind and Love our neighbour as ourself." We remain that we might offer the gifts and blessings of abundance and love and grace to all creation.

You see Jesus did not come simply to die. Jesus came as the word of God made flesh, as the incarnation so that we might know how to live. To the author of John's gospel the incarnation, cross, resurrection and ascension are not separate events, rather they are one salvific expression revealing God to all the world. Jesus lived, died, was resurrected and returned to the father so that we humans might know God and therefore know how to live out God's mission on earth. We are here and are entrusted by God to do the work of the Holy now on earth.

Lose writes "being left behind is an honor, an invitation to participate in the glory of the Father, a commissioning, in fact, into the work of the Son. Eternal life, glory, relationship with God – in John's Gospel these aren't things waiting out there somewhere but instead are all around us. Where, we may naturally ask? In doing what Jesus does. Healing, feeding, caring, listening, sharing, making manifest the grace and mercy of the God "who so loved the world" (3:16)."²

In fact Jesus leaves us so that our relationship with the holy might become more powerful, more involved, more intimate. I have come to understand that the image of Jesus' ascension is not for us to see him as one who rules from on 'high' as we have been taught. Rather we hear the mysterious story of ascension so that we might be commissioned. Jesus has moved the power to us. We are now the witness of God - God's promise lived out.

We are now living out the kingdom here on earth as we care for the poor, feed the hungry, make prayer shawls for the suffering, offer healing touch to the weary, give a helping hand to a friend, cry with the lonely, celebrate with the joyful. We are given the opportunity to live out God's love here and now in this time and place.

We are able to live out God's love not just on the labeled mission fields of this world but even in our daily work and lives. All the ordinary, mundane things of life when lived in love are expressions of The Holy.

¹ Lose, David http://www.workingpreacher.org/dear_wp.aspx?article_id=479

² IBID

Thom M. Shuman wrote

Help Us to See

“Why do you stand looking up towards heaven? (Acts 1:10-11)

We look for you, straining our eyes
into the far country,
but our vision is disrupted
by the least, the lost, the littlest, the last among us.

We race after you, trying to catch up,
and turing the corner find only
a homeless family in our path.

We wander the streets, yearning to find you,
calling your name,
but it is only

a single mother who turns and wearily smiles,
a street person who whispers ‘hello’
a little girl who pirouettes and takes our hand.

Gone.....
But you are still here, Lord
Help us to see.

All the ordinary tasks of everyday life – work, play, family life, civic involvement, volunteer opportunities – all of these things, are work that honor God. Because they are offering love and life and abundance. Anything that helps care for this world and the people God loves so much participates in the glory Jesus talks about.³

Sometimes I wonder if we know how important the offering of life we give is. I wonder if we know that God has commissioned us and believes in us. I wonder if we recognize our intimate connection with The Holy in our daily lives? Do you know that I fully believe that faith, spirituality, sacred and secular are impossible to separate? Do you know that I honestly believe you were created to be a sacred vessel, a container of God’s love? What if you saw this hour and a half in church every week not as a separation from the rest of your life, but rather a connection to the journey of every day. Would you recognize how the spirit is living within and through you in every moment?

³ IBID

I invite you to pause and think about your daily, ordinary lives for a moment. Ask yourself where are you or can you begin to care for God's world and people in your regular, ordinary, everyday life. I then invite you to then take a moment to pray for courage, strength, and guidance as God calls you to be who you were created to be each and every day.

Let's just take a moment to discover the sacred within us

(after silence) Sing...."Take, O take me as I am summon out what I shall be; set your seal upon my heart and live in me."

"Some Christians believe this life is simply practice for the next one. Others believe it is some kind of trial, something to be endured until a future glory. Still others think of this life as a test, a time and place to prove ourselves worthy of heaven."⁴ I don't believe any of these things alone. Of course I recognize there are trials, and life can be ...well hell on earth at times. But we have been promised that we are not alone. We have the spirit of God and the body of Christ to journey with us and because of that we and all those around us are called to participate in the living, graceful, loving work of The Holy. We have been commissioned and blessed to participate in God's blessing for all creation.

May we so live.
Amen.

⁴ IBID