

Scripture Reading:

John 17:1-11

That They May Be One

It's hard to know how to preach on a day like this. I left here celebrating the "risen christ" and in the last several weeks you have journeyed with that risen Jesus in one way or another. Today is the last Sunday of easter and Jesus is praying for his disciples and us that we might live out the love that he and God have for each other and for us.

That all may be one are words that strike me anew in this culture that I find myself in. If you have ever spent any time speaking with me about the cultural differences I find between Canadians and Filipinos you will know that I have always been warmed and greeted by the hospitality of my new found community. I come to you today having had an experience of community that has changed my life forever. I have faced my cultural need for independence having to learn a new way of letting others participate in my life. One of the most profound moments of the trip was one evening when we were sitting out on the street in front of the house, we were chatting, having a drink and I was meeting the neighbours. People kept joining the party and they were all making every effort they could to speak to me and play with Amihan, (Macky translating from time to time). I was enjoying the moment, and trying to some it all up. In awe and warmed by how my child played as if this had been her playground since the first day of her life. I enjoyed the smells, noises, textures and tastes that surrounded me. I was somewhat of an observer and learner in this moment and Macky felt it was time to explain something very important to em. He stood up he held his hands out like this in an attempt to show all people gathered together as one and he said "This, this is your new family. Not just my family, (he points to the house) but all of these people are our family. They will not let anything happen to you or to Amihan, you can trust these people with your life." They all nodded in agreement as they tried to explain and affirm to this North American what he meant. And for a month I lived it and felt it.

Imagine being a Canadian mother in a foreign country in the house turning around and looking for your child "Where's Amihan?" I would say in somewhat of a panic. "Outside" someone would respond "Don't worry" they would say to me over and over. I got a little better at it as the weeks went along, but never before had I experienced "A village raising a child." Never before had I lived a community that was so integrated and a part of one another.

That's why at conference this week when a colleague shared a quote she had heard on CBC from an Ethiopian woman who had not been in Canada long I was profoundly moved. She said something like "In Canada you don't know and love your neighbours, if you don't know your neighbour, how do you know if they are hungry?" My tears welled up because that is the piece of

culture shock I feel, I long for us to be so connected with one another in such a way that we truly know our neighbour (and then the great catch is- and they know us too).

If the church is called to be anything, it is called to be the neighbour of great love and welcome. “If the church is called to be anything it is called to be a home to the homeless and displaced. This does not just mean those who lack a physical home, but those who find themselves alone without a family, without friends, without a spiritual or emotional home. Unfortunately, though, it is too often the Church that leaves people as refugees, turning them away from the community of faith for no reason other than that they are different – in gender, sexuality, colour, culture, language, theology or appearance. Every community has people who long for a place to find a home in God’s grace and God’s Kingdom. These refugees are deeply loved and unconditionally welcomed by Christ, and we are called to manifest this as we open our doors and our hearts to them. More than this, we are called to seek out those who long to know the promise of God’s Spirit. This calling has a huge impact on how we identify ourselves as Church, on how we understand our mission, and on how we worship. As William Temple said, “The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those that are not its members.” The challenge for us is to recognise that we are a refugee community – one that does not find its home in the kingdoms of this world, or by controlling political power structures (as the disciples had to learn), but one that waits for, that longs for, a return to glory, to a home that is eternal and that is both manifest now and yet to be realised fully in the future. Once we have truly grasped this, we find we cannot help but stand alongside and seek to serve those who find themselves to be refugees of every kind.”¹

Now back to our scripture. In today’s scripture Jesus is praying for ‘believers’ of all generations that they may know Jesus and God in such a way that they become one with God and one another. In the book of John to know is to be in relationship with. And to know God and Jesus is to have abundant eternal life.

“It’s not often that we get a straight forward definition of eternal life, but here it is, “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (17:3).”

I have to admit that is not the first definition I would have thought of for eternal life, but I think it is a great one to dig into. “On this last Sunday of Easter, in the season of the resurrection, here is an idea about eternal life that just might stand out and mean something beyond the empty tomb and the lilies and “Jesus Christ is Risen Today.”

Eternal life is to know God and Jesus...and to know God in the Fourth Gospel has no connection to cognitive constructions, creedal consents, or specified knowledge about God. Rather, knowing God is synonymous with being in a relationship with God.

The life of Jesus shows us what it looks like to live in relationship with God. To live in love, grace, mercy and hope at all times. In the weeks of Easter I imagine you have heard the stories of Jesus sharing these characteristics. In Thomas and on the Emmaus road, Jesus lived grace, welcome and forgiveness to dear friends who had journeyed with him and now they have

¹ <http://sacredise.com/lectionary/2014/05/easter-7a/>

doubted his very life and mission. You heard the story of the prodigal, who received inexplicable acceptance and grace. When you think about what it is to be in relationship with the holy imagine yourself as the woman at the well, or the prodigal, or the leper, or the thief. To be in relationship, to be one with the trinitarian God is to be accepted, loved, blessed and cherished beyond human understanding. Just like all other things of God it is not 'relationship' as we experience it with our acquaintances or even most of our friends. It is shalom, agape, all consuming peace and love.

Jesus prays for us "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." What if this blessing provided a theme for our entire season of Pentecost? "It is, perhaps, one of the most relevant and truthful definitions of what Pentecost is supposed to be as disciples of Christ. Jesus is no longer in the world. The incarnation is over. Jesus has been resurrected. He ascended to the Father from whence he came (1:1). But we are still in the world, Jesus' works are now in our hands (14:12), and Jesus is counting on us to be his presence in the wake of his absence (21:15-17).

What if we imagined that the resurrection of Jesus was just the beginning and not the conclusion of the Gospel? That the promises of the resurrection are, in part, ours to fulfill? How would a life of discipleship, of witness, of love, between Pentecost and Advent, be different were we to trust that Jesus meant what he said in 14:12, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

One commentator shared this quote "Look at us, said the violets blooming at her feet, all last winter we slept in the seeming death but at the right time God awakened us, and here we are to comfort you." – Edward Payson Roe

Today is the seventh and last day of Easter. For forty days since his Resurrection Jesus has been interacting with his followers. In the bible forty is the symbolic number for transition. So I wonder, as we begin a new season; as we head into a somewhat unknown season for us as a congregation, as I return from a season of rest; what will this transition look like? The apostles (and dare I say 'we') wonder if this is the time Jesus will restore the kingdom (Acts 1:6). And then we wonder What that would look like?

Jesus tells the disciples it is not for them to know the right times God has chosen (Acts 1:7). A kairos moment (God moment of accomplishment) happens in divine time - not by our manufacturing it. After these words, Jesus ascends out of their sight into a cloud. This is the first part of the transition: Jesus will no longer be with them in the same way. This is the day we find ourselves living into in the Christian calendar today. But then as seems to be common in the events near the end of Jesus' time on earth two men (perhaps angels) in white robes appear and ask them why they are looking up. You would think the disciples would be getting used to this sort of event, and quickly recognize the error of their ways but fortunately for us Jesus' followers in his lifetime need to learn Holy lessons over and over just as we do. Jesus has been taken from them but they had expected Jesus himself to do the restoring of the kingdom. And so confused, afraid, and perhaps overwhelmed by the task they realize they have just been given, they run

back to their hideout, back to their tomb. The completion of the transition will be at Pentecost when the Spirit convinces them of their own role in bringing about the kingdom. What will that look like? Perhaps, It will be a bit like violets awakening when it is the right time after a long winter.

So have we caught the message? All this talk about the apostles is talk about us. The holy is wondering, we are wondering “When will our right time be to step out in the power of the Spirit to do the work of the kingdom? Violets at first come out looking very small, even when full grown not humongous. That is the way God works his kingdom: by our small daily efforts. Thus, we and the world transition and are transformed. In small daily ways we are new people and there is a new world.”

Haiku

My inner blossom

peaks through my hard shell to light

on God’s right time. Now?

So as Jesus leaves this worldly journey and The Spirit comes upon us on the Pentecost season let us discover where God would have us blossom. Let us discover how we as a congregation and individuals will live so that we might be one with God and one another.