

Proper 13
Year B 2018

Ep. 4:1-16
John 6:24-35

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

The past couple of weeks
the author of the Gospel of John
has been trying to give us insight
into the realities of Jesus' ministry.

In part, we have been given a glimpse
into the desperate and yet hopeful crowds
who have surrounded and followed Jesus
and the disciples as they journey.

A journey back and forth
between the Jews and the Gentiles
weaving together the two communities with Jesus' teachings.

Teachings in which Jesus attempts
to make known God's desire for all creation
for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

It's clearly no easy task
moving back and forth
between those who should know
God's innermost desires
and those who have yet to experience
this God of which Jesus and the disciples speak.

And yet, it's not clear to us
through these passages
the number of people in the crowds,
whether Gentile or Jewish,
that are able to fully grasp that
which Jesus most ardently attempts
to teach through word and action.

It seems clear though
that there are many who desperately want to experience Jesus.

And not just experience Him
for the next short while
as they are present with Him
but rather there seems to be
an ardent desire to ingest all that Jesus has to offer.

In part, I find this fascinating
especially on the part of the Gentiles.

Our Jewish forefathers and mothers
had at least some exposure to God
but not the Gentiles,
and even they are being drawn in as well.

For these crowds,
they are so captivated
that it feels to me
that they are almost overwhelming Jesus and the disciples.

In fact, I think when Jesus has to get into a boat
and row out from shore
to begin to teach
as a result of the press of the crowds,
it's a pretty clear indication
of the ferocity of these crowds
who desire to be in the presence of Jesus.

To be able to come near,
and to even touch, the One that embodies the heartbeat of God.

In reality, I get a little queasy
just thinking of the crowds pressed in on Jesus,
the demands hurled at him one after the other
to make whole, to feed, to dispense justice over and over again

This may be a news flash,
but I am not a crowd person.

I have never been the person
who will wait in a crowd to get into a concert,
a game, or a performance of one sort or another.

I have a healthy respect for personal space.

When I was young,
my aunt would come to visit from New York and,
not having children,
when we would rush her
to give and receive hugs and kisses,
you could see her tense just a bit.

And especially during the holidays
when we would all be gathered in the kitchen
cooking or eating
she would always remind us not to crowd her
by saying this is my bubble.

Remember it.

I admit, a tactic I may have possibly employed
myself with nieces and nephews.

You may notice when things get a little tight in the undercroft
or when I'm in a crowd
I will find my way to the edge
or simply do this to create some space.

It's not that I don't like being around and with people,
I just don't need them this close.

So, the thought of crowds
pressing in to the point of having to jump into a boat,
or sneak across the sea at night,
or feeling some unknown and unseen person
tugging on your clothing,
makes me feel pretty uneasy.

And yet, there was also a time in my life
when I was desperately hungry
to find the God who created all in love
and desires peace and justice for all creation.

I can relate to these crowds,
to their fervent need to come close
to Jesus.

I can remember the longing,
the hope I carried with me day
in and day out for some time
searching for that and the one who
I knew in my deepest being surely existed.

But it took a decent amount of time
of searching,
of ardently exploring so many different experiences
before I realized that what I was in search of
was right in front of and inside of me.

I can sympathize with the crowds
hounding Jesus day and night
searching for a spark of hope
in a time which was filled with injustice and fear.

It took me quite a while to
see, hear and accept
that God was not just a judge
passing out indictments on everyone and everything.

Just as with the crowds described in scripture,
it took a while for me to also accept
that all gifts that I have received
are from God and God alone.

I have not maneuvered myself
into a position in life
to which I am more deserving
just as others who find themselves
in difficult and untenable situations
are in such positions because of
some unfavorable judgment by God.

We are all God's beloved creation
and in the eyes and heart of God there is no ranking.

No bad, good, better or best.

So when I hear the words
written to the Ephesians,
I find myself and my journey.

We are all created of the God of love,
in love and for love.

We are called to speak the truth in love.

At all times, in all places and to everyone.

I'm not saying it's easy,
I'm saying that is who God has created us to be.

For me, I can readily admit,
that I have not mastered this.

The process of bringing to life
a tiny house village on our property
has been a true test of my ability to speak the truth in love.

At times, I believe, I have managed to do this.

At other times, I believe that I have failed.

But what I know in my deepest being
is that God does not judge my failures harshly
but instead celebrates my successes
and will walk with me as I continue to work to improve.

I also know, that I have the life and ministry of Jesus to guide me.

I can look to Jesus to steady me
when I stand in the midst of
fierce and vehement opposition
to those truths I believe reveal
the love and justice God intends for all creation.

So, what does all of my
self revelation and blathering
have to do for us here today?

What is today's scripture
offering us?

Well, I think it's safe to say,
No matter which entrance you used today
To enter the church,
It's obvious that the crowds will
Soon be pressing in on us.

Some may be searching and we will
Have the opportunity to meet them.

Others may be more like me and some of you
And hang back on the edges
Until they feel comfortable.

And yet others we may need to reach out to
And still others we will never encounter.

And of equal importance
will be some of our neighbors
to whom we are a source of comfort,
offering a safe space.

We will need to find ways
to engage and continue our
relationships with all of these neighbors.

We will need to raise our voices
to continue to speak the truth in love
about who we are,
why we gather together,
and always, be willing to tell our stories.

The stories that reveal the healing,
holy and loving power of Jesus
who walks with us and leads us
beyond these doors into the crowds.