

Seventh Sunday of Easter Year A

Acts 1:6-14

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

If you knew you were about to die, what would you want to leave behind? What final words or acts of love would you want you give to those who are closest to you? This is where we find Jesus today, at the climax of his "Farewell Discourse" to his disciples. As always, he is speaking to a particular group of people, and yet at the same time his words, prayers, and hopes are directed to all of us across all generations.

As we come to the end of the Easter season, we circle back to right before the Passion of Christ. Knowing what his future would hold- his suffering on the cross, his death and descent to the dead, and his ascension and return to the God the Father- he knew the hour had come for these things to be completed. And before and after these harrowing moments, he would teach those who would listen about Loving God and Loving yourself. Loving your neighbor. And following these two great commandments. A life summed up in story and testimony, witness, healing, and transformation. Jesus is moments from death,

moments from completing what he came to do. How would the disciples move forward without him?

If the nature of this passage feels familiar, it probably is. It follows the genre of a farewell speech, in which a great man or woman, soon before they die, gather their followers and impart words of wisdom and preparation for their disciples when they leave this earth. And while it's debated whether Jesus actually said these words¹, we've received them as Holy Scripture, so let's uncover how our lives and hearts are changed from hearing them.

After Jesus' returns back to God, and before the world is gifted with the Holy Spirit, the disciples are left yet again to wonder what's next for them. Jesus' prayer that we hear today seeks to comfort them by reminding them of their relationship with God, an intimate, mind, body, and soul connection. Even though he is physically gone, they are not alone. We all seek to find comfort in different ways. Maybe it's a cuppa tea, a great book and a bath. Maybe it's using our bodies by hiking or cycling in the outdoors. Or maybe it's our favorite meal with some great company. They all matter. The ways we chose to take care of ourselves and be gentle with ourselves is necessary and crucial. They feed us.

¹ Brown, Raymond E. The Gospel According to John.

They help us recharge. And yet, in some ways, they feed us on a surface-level- for it's only when we go to the source of all creation, to the God who knows us better than anyone on earth, where we can find ultimate peace.

Jesus communicates a number of things here, but chiefly among them is how we discover eternal life and live in unity. In this context, in John, eternal life is about the here and now- not waiting until what happens when we die. Eternal life is living into our fullest selves reflected in the image of God's love for us. We can do this by knowing God. In one way, it's simple. Be in relationship with God. But in other ways, not so much. Because even though we know and are connected to God, we are not left without questions about life. When we feel let down when our prayers aren't answered readily or how we'd like them to be answered. When rampant violence ravages our world and brutally murders people enjoying life - the suffering of humans, the injustices we encounter and feel we don't know what to do or where to start to help- this is where the rubber of our faith meets the road.

Ultimately, where do we find that spiritual comfort and nourishment? Jesus' parting words and these types of farewell speeches aren't about how you only live once or live every day like it's your last. They speak to us at a deeper

level. Jesus doesn't answer all of the questions still burning in the disciples' hearts, the road ahead of them and for us is sometimes difficult. But he does remind all of us that in the unity of our community, in being one with one another, we can stand stronger than being alone- in fact we can be as one and as strong as the Holy Trinity itself. When we leave this place today, we are held in the prayers of Jesus Christ and in the prayers of this community. And it means something. That is a unique promise that we can't find anywhere else. We are all a part of the mystical body of Christ and no matter what we face; Jesus has been through it and is with us through Spirit and community.

Jesus knew his followers would experience loss and grief. In life, we all experience death. In the midst of Rachel's birth, as you prayed for us, my grandmother died. Three days before she died, all of my family returned to PA to celebrate my grandparents' 70th wedding anniversary. While a great number of us returned back to our homes, states and even continents away, she died surrounded by her husband and her children. The physical separation was great. But we were connected in unity with one another- through technology. Through prayer. Through God. Her death was not easy to witness. Just like Jesus' death.

But even though she's gone now, just like Jesus, they're not really gone because of a unity that crosses the ages.

In some ways, we can feel like we're over-connected. But in other ways are we not connected enough? Our relationships with one another become stronger the more linked in we are, the more we know, God. In Jesus' final words, there isn't just hope in the future, in the eternal, but there is hope in the here and now. Because we are not alone. God is always with us, both in the here and now, and in the eternal.