

10 May 2020

The 5th Sunday of Easter/The 9th Sunday of Quarantine

St. Michael's Episcopal Church Online

John 14:1-14

The Rev. Dr. Jason Haddox

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

(People: The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

Today is the fifth Sunday in Easter season, and it also happens to be Mother's Day. So, we begin with a story of adoption and a family reunion.

Identical twin boys, separated at birth, were adopted by two different families. The first family was of Hispanic ancestry, and named their son Juan. The second family was of Middle Eastern ancestry, and named their son Amahl. The two boys grew up knowing that they were adopted, and wondering about their family of origin. When they turned eighteen they began the process of searching for one another, and soon enough found what they were looking for. The families came together, the brothers met for the first time, and there was a wonderful celebration of what was now one very large family.

One of the relatives was telling a neighbor of this reunion afterward, and was asked "What was it like? They grew up in such different contexts and communities." "Yes, that's true," said the cousin. "But they are identical twins. If you've seen Juan, you've seen Amahl."

(Pause for groans from the congregation.)

In the Gospel reading for this morning, Jesus and his friends are gathered together sharing a meal. But not just any meal. We read these words today in the middle of Eastertide, but in the narrative arc of John's Gospel, it is Holy Thursday. They are in the Upper Room, it is dark outside, Jesus has washed their feet and given them "a new commandment: Love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my followers and companions, that you have love for one another."

He's preparing them for "the new normal"—life together without his immediate presence.

We know a bit about missing "immediate presence" these days. And a new normal that is strange and unnerving and frustrating. So I can feel for Thomas and Philip and the others. "Jesus, what are you saying? Where are you going and why can't we come too? What is going to happen to us?"

Again and again Jesus tells them: Do not be afraid. You know me—so you know my Father. If you've seen me, you've seen my Father. (You've seen Juan—you've seen Amahl!) No difference—Jesus is the very revelation of the love and compassion of God, and the writer of the Gospel of John

is at great pains to make sure the reader understands this. Again and again Jesus tells them, “You have faith in God; have faith in me.”

Note: “Faith” is not simply agreeing with some intellectual propositions about who Jesus is. It is an investment, not of money, but of the heart. It is to trust that Jesus is trustworthy, that his love and wisdom and his compassion is “the real deal”, the God-with-us showing up in everyday life. In a moment we will say together the Apostles’ Creed. At the Eucharist we normally say the Nicene Creed. The word Creed (Latin, *credo*=I believe) is related to the word for heart. To “believe” in this way is “to set the heart”, the whole self, in an attitude of trust and commitment. To trust that love and live into it, and give it away.

If we had continued to read the very next few verses further in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John, we would have heard these words: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth.” For those of us who have the Anglican Choral Music’s Greatest Hits album on infinite loop on our inner soundtrack, immediately cue Thomas Tallis’ *If ye love me...*

If you love me, keep my commandments.
And what is it that Jesus commands?
Love one another. Love as he has loved.
Generously. Abundantly. Holding nothing back. Even to death. And beyond.

We see that kind of love these days, in the hospitals. In the Emergency Rooms.
In the first responders and health care professionals as they pour themselves out to care for the sick and the dying—even at grievous risk to themselves.

We see it in those who continue to work—stocking the shelves and cleaning the floors, wiping down the carts and the baskets at Crest and Homeland, delivering the medicine and the mail and the other things that have to get from here to there.

We see it in those who stay at home if they can, in spite of frustration and anxiety and utter boredom, to protect the most vulnerable ones. To buy time for the system to work, without putting themselves into the middle of everything.

To the friends and followers two thousand years ago in Palestine, and this very day in Norman Oklahoma, Jesus speaks these words: “Do not be afraid. You may feel fear—and that is okay. But do not become ‘fear-full’, do not allow yourself to become a repository for fear that corrodes and destroys from within. Trust the love that I have shown you; show that love, share that love, with one another.”

On this fifth Sunday of Eastertide 2020—which is also Mother’s Day—let me conclude with words taken from the writings of Julian of Norwich, a late 12th century writer, mystic, and spiritual counselor.

“As truly as God is our Father
So just as truly is he our Mother.
In our Father, God Almighty,
we have our being;
In our merciful Mother
we are remade and restored.

Our fragmented lives are knit together
And by giving and yielding ourselves
to the Holy Spirit
we are made whole.

All shall be well,
and all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.”

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Amen, amen.