

May 21, 2017
Year A; Sixth Sunday of Easter
Acts 17: 22-31
Psalm 66: 7-18
1 Peter 3: 13-22
John 14: 15-21

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Today is the 6th Sunday OF Easter, the next to last Sunday of this season, as we are drawing to a close of these 50 Easter days of alleluias and resurrection celebration!

This Thursday is Ascension Day, one of my favorite days in the church year, and which we will observe next Sunday. And then in 2 weeks we will celebrate Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

Our reading today from John, again from Jesus’s final hours with his friends at the Last Supper, this reading foreshadows both Jesus’ return to heaven, his ascension, and that his friends, and we, will not be orphaned, left alone, that the Spirit, the Advocate will be with us.

In the midst of this reading Jesus says something quite extraordinary and a bit overwhelming: “...I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

Jesus is saying that among his people, as we keep his commandments, he is in us, and we in him.

Using the language of our reading last week, we are dwelling places of God, vessels of God’s love.

To this concept I can only reply with an incredulous.....Me?? The very idea that I as an individual might be the vessel of God’s love seems.....daunting.

I immediately think to myself.....I am not good enough, I am not ready, I have certainly not yet mastered holding all of the commandments, especially not the one that says I need to constantly love my neighbor.....i am crabby, I am self-centered...how can I possibly be that vessel?

And then another stunning thought....and what about YOU? I know some of you that are so not ready to be a vessel of God's love either; they can hardly be a vessel of pleasantness, much less godly love...

SO! This whole concept of Jesus within each of us and each of us within Jesus....very hard to grasp.....impossible...

But a slight detail of translation might help us see this reading in a new and illuminating light.....The Greek for "in you" can also be understood as plural, as "among you"

So on the one hand we must give up our oh so human and sinful need to be in the spotlight, to be admired, to be the one and only....But we can also know the relief that it's not all up to us alone.

Christianity is a communal faith, we are called to be together, to serve together, to follow Christ together.

Jesus rarely taught or spoke with one disciple....Jesus's story is one of groups, teaching to them healing with them, traveling and living together....

When I was at Shrine Mont recently I attended a workshop taught by Bishop Ted, and he was speaking to this communal aspect of our faith, memorably saying:

"You know, we cannot baptize ourselves." In other words, we cannot enter our faith, much less practice our faith, alone.

So perhaps, when Jesus says to us: "...I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you",perhaps Jesus is speaking to us as a community....

So we can stop waiting to be worthy individuals, we can stop waiting to work out and confess all of our flaws, we can stop waiting to get all ready to be God's vessel....

No....instead we can simply begin working together, to increase and extend our lives together, as communities of faithful service.....

Many of you have told me you are drawn to the blessing I use at times at the conclusion of our worship, the blessing that begins....

“My friends, life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us, so be quick to love and make haste to be kind; and rest assured that God is infinitely more concerned with the promise of our future than the mistakes of our past.....”

This blessing speaks to our call to kindness and service NOW and together, not when we get our solitary selves all worked out and flawless, but now and together.....my flaws are muted by your goodness, and vice versa! Thanks be to God!

I know I have been through dark times when I could not pray, and I imagine you might have known those times too. But we need to not forget in those dark times, that others, our communities, prayed with us and for us.

When we pray together here.....we pray not.....MY Father who art in heaven....but together....OUR Father who art in heaven....And when the words feel dry and distant to us, and we falter in even saying them....others nearby hold us up, and speak for us....praying when we cannot pray.

My Father and my step mother have been married over 25 years, and my step mother is one of the most faithful and kind and giving people I know. Many years ago she experienced a deep darkness when one of her children died.

She told me repeatedly during that time that she could not travel that dark road of grief on her own strength, but that the prayers of others carried her, and brought her a peace beyond all....

And the prayers that carried her were from flawed, imperfect, at times self-involved people....from me and others...prayers that we offered as a community of love for her....we could be God’s vessel together....only together were we enough...

And so this morning we each bring our flawed, not-ready selves here, to our church community, and Jesus tells us, ...I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in among you, Trinity Church/St. Mary's Whitechapel.....and he means it!

And he has work for us to do together right now.....reminding us:

“.....for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.....” (Matthew 25:35)

Amen.

The Rev. Megan Limburg