

RESTORING & EMPOWERING

5/24/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Livestreamed*)

Easter 7 (A): Psalm 68:1-10, 33-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Imagine having spent a number of years working on a project that you were extremely passionate about, with a group of people, whom you came to absolutely love. To keep the project going, you all had made significant sacrifices, and in the process, your lives were completely transformed. And now that it's ending, every moment counts. You will never forget this time together, and you know that none of you will ever be the same. You also realize only you and those you've been journeying with will truly understand what the experience has been like.

People who've been in the Peace Corps tell me it's a lot like that for them. As we come upon Memorial Day, I'm guessing military folks think of their platoon in this way. And, I can only imagine that's how Nancy, our preschool director, and her team feel right now as they absorb the news of the preschool being permanently closed. Together, they touched the lives of thousands of children over the past 30 years, and they've all been made different through their shared experience.

That's what the disciples must have been feeling as they sat with Jesus in the final hours before his crucifixion. This morning's reading from John is a continuation of the passages we explored the last two weeks; they're in the Upper Room with Jesus, being prepared for him to leave. They've all been through something no one else will understand.

They're not only grieving the fact that he's leaving; they're mourning the loss of their shared work. And, the kicker is, they have no idea what comes next! They must be feeling completely frustrated—even betrayed—by this idea that God is ending work they thought would continue on forever.

So, Jesus does what any good priest does. He prays for those gathered. He prays to God, but he prays the words he knows his friends need to hear. He is all at once blessing and comforting them, while commissioning them to carry on the work in new, and, yet, unknown ways.

In some respects, Jesus' prayer becomes a farewell address. He understands, as most priests do, that they will hear his words differently if the words are in the form of a prayer. Instead of just saying, "you've all meant the world to me," Jesus lets the disciples hear how meaningful their connection has been, through his prayer to God.

This is important to our understanding of this passage, because, if we're not careful, we could assume that Jesus is saying, "only these people were chosen by God for me to love." Instead, he's acknowledging the faithfulness of those who were willing to stand by his side through thick and thin. Jesus is saying, "they are truly the ones God sent, because here they are with me."

Additionally, the prayer is utilized to remind the disciples of the bigger picture. Jesus does this by pointing to a much higher set of stakes than this crew simply carrying on together in their current configuration. The stakes he points to have to do with eternal life, which can also be translated as an enduring, abundant life beyond what happens here in the physical realm. And, yet, eternal life is experienced here on earth in the ways we treat each other. The stakes

Jesus points to are about helping the most amount of people experience God’s abundant love— even if it means sacrificing that which they hold dear.

The kind of hope Jesus offers in that prayer is reiterated in our reading from 1st Peter— that in suffering with Christ, we will be rewarded with restoration, empowerment, strength and renewal. We are never encouraged to suffer simply for the sake of suffering, but consistently reminded by Jesus that our willingness to suffer with others will be a part of a transformational process that is hard to comprehend, but a truth we all know at our core. We are better together.

So, Jesus also prays that they will be one just as he is one with God, because he understands that when things change, emotions run high and the tendency is for in-fighting to take over. However, divisiveness will not move the transformed project forward. Note that Jesus doesn’t demand they all think alike, or all agree on everything, rather that they be unified in God.

In the midst of our Stay Home; Stay Safe precautions, I’ve been thinking about Julian of Norwich. She lived in the late 1600s as part of a monastic order that required her to live most of her life within the confines of her small room, with only a window to the outside world.

She spent lots of time writing about her devotion to God and her love of humanity. Julian once wrote: “God is nearer to us than our own soul.” She lived in seclusion, and yet out of her window, she offered words of wisdom and prayers of comfort to the people in her community.

No matter who we are; no matter where we are, we can share the hope offered in God’s grace to others. Julian lived with the belief that even in the midst of struggle, we experience God. I’ll end with one of her most famous quotes: “All shall be well, and all shall be well. And all manner of things shall be well.”

-AMEN

Readings (*Common English Bible Translation*)

Psalm 68:1-10, 33-35

Let God rise up;

let his enemies scatter;

let those who hate him run scared before him!

Like smoke is driven away, drive them away!

Like wax melting before fire,

let the wicked perish before God!

But let the righteous be glad

and celebrate before God.

Let them rejoice with gladness!

Sing to God! Sing praises to his name!

Exalt the one who rides the clouds!

The LORD is his name. Celebrate before him!

Father of orphans and defender of widows
is God in his holy habitation.
God settles the lonely in their homes;
he sets prisoners free with happiness,^[a]
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.
When you went forth before your people, God,
when you marched through the wasteland,
the earth shook!
Yes, heaven poured down
before God, the one from Sinai—
before God, the God of Israel!
You showered down abundant rain, God;
when your inheritance grew weary,
you restored it yourself,
and your creatures settled in it.
In your goodness, God,
you provided for the poor.
Sing to the one who rides through heaven,
the most ancient heaven.
Look! God sends forth his voice,
his mighty voice.
Recognize how strong God is!
His majesty extends over Israel;
his strength is in the clouds.
You are awesome, God, in your sanctuaries—
the God of Israel who gives strength and power to his people!

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

Dear friends, don't be surprised about the fiery trials that have come among you to test you. These are not strange happenings. Instead, rejoice as you share Christ's suffering. You share his suffering now so that you may also have overwhelming joy when his glory is revealed. If you are mocked because of Christ's name, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory—indeed, the Spirit of God—rests on you.

Therefore, humble yourselves under God's power so that he may raise you up in the last day. Throw all your anxiety onto him, because he cares about you. Be clearheaded. Keep alert. Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith. Do so in the knowledge that your fellow believers are enduring the same suffering throughout the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, the one who called you into his eternal glory in

Christ Jesus, will himself restore, empower, strengthen, and establish you. To him be power forever and always. Amen.

John 17:1-11

When Jesus finished saying these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you. You gave him authority over everyone so that he could give eternal life to everyone you gave him. This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I shared with you before the world was created.

“I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

“I’m praying for them. I’m not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours. Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them. I’m no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I’m coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.