

Easter 6 June 1, 2014

John 17: 1-11

Let's take a moment to pray:

Clean the slate, God! Keep us present that we may fully enter in to these words that have spoken truth for so many years and hear the thing that we need to hear on this day. Amen.

Alright! Multi-Sensory Sunday! So far we have had some hear, and we will have a little more from the choir after I'm done here. Touch – we passed the peace. Taste is coming in communion. Smell the children helped me out with. What about sight? There are many beautiful things around here – this hanging is something beautiful to reflect on, the trees outside, all of these gorgeous faces around us. We are not short on beautiful God-ness around us, but I will offer another visual – these are pieces of art all entitled “God with us” from various artists around the world using different mediums. Just take a few moments to drink them each in. Cheryl is going to play and we will have a few moments on each one for reflection. Notice what you like and don't like about each of them, what surprises you, what strikes you, what emotions you are feeling looking at each one.

Thank you.

Now, I am going to start with a little context here for our lectionary bit of Gospel reading this week: this is happening right before Jesus heads into the garden and is arrested, before the crucifixion. He is having dinner with the disciples and there is a long, long conversation that started with him washing their feet, then there is the business of who will betray him, then the new command, “Love each other as I have loved you, this is how others will know you are my disciples” now there is another sermon for another time, then we have keep the commandments, the piece about the vine and the branches, don't worry if you are being hated because of your faith, oh wait, more about loving each other, then something about some rough times ahead. All in the same dialogue! Then Jesus offers a little foreshadowing about the Spirit coming and his own ascension. What we have are chapters and chapters of discussion between Jesus and the disciples. This is all as they are sharing a meal and hanging out. And then! Like only Jesus can do, he starts to pray at his own dinner party. Today we only got to hear the first part of what is a long and really amazing prayer.

So they are all listening to this prayer. Would you just consider that for a moment? What it might have felt like to have Jesus, right beside you, praying for you. I would really encourage you to take some ownership over the prayer he offers, because we too are his disciples. So know that just as Jesus offered up those few to God, asking that they be guarded as they pursue the life of following him, asking that they be joined in heart and mind, so too is he inviting Gods care as we try to follow, asking that we be joined in heart and mind.

Another little bit of interesting information is that there is no element in this Gospel of “teach us how to pray” and then the Lord's prayer. This is, essentially, the prayer that Jesus taught through public offering, according to the Gospel writer here in John. One might say that this is the Lord's Prayer according to John.

But listen, I am not going to stand up here and say, pray because that is what Jesus did, as a sort of surface, *just do it* type of thing. I'm not going to tell you that you should pray or that it'll be good for you. What I will talk about is this concept of relationship with God.

John's Gospel assumes that people were created by God to be in relationship with God and that Jesus came to bring all of creation into unity and into God. Here, in this passage, the baton is passed to us –

the baton of unifying God and the world. This means that we must know God and know the world. Now, the whole of the Gospel of John uses language that really pushes intimacy and unity. The Greek verbs are knowing and loving and they are repeated here revealing to us that depth of love comes with depth of knowing. One cannot love that which one does not know.

Which then takes me right back to the first part of the greatest commandment from Matthew 22: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." How do we love God if we do not know God?

All through this Gospel we are invited into deep *relationship* with God, but in particular in this passage. Relationship; which is reciprocal. To know God is also to be known by God. What fears does that bring up? In our human-ness, our fears tell us, "if they really knew me, they couldn't love me." And I wonder, do we have that same fear about God? If we really were to offer ourselves, as we are today, right now, to God, would we be judging ourselves? Criticizing? Could we even stomach that kind of intimacy with God?

Some of us can barely stand to be in relationship with other people. I mean *real* relationship, beyond the "Hi, how are you?" "Oh, I'm fine." That *fine* word can be so loaded. We have been confused, hurt, heartbroken. We may feel like we are broken. We are afraid to share ourselves, "if they really knew me, they couldn't love me."

But we are a people of a faith whose stories tell us that God loves us just as we are, without conditions. That we belong to God. That we are Gods beloved. That there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and that there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. That entering into relationship with God is safe. It might be a wild ride, with some unexpected turns, but that Gods love is steadfast, steady, unchanging, secure. We can begin building a relationship with God on the foundation of that trust.

Which brings me back around to this idea of multi-sensory. If we look at Johns Gospel in its entirety, we get a multi-dimensional, multi-sensory picture of what *knowing God* or being in relationship with God is all about. That we can seek God with all of our senses – we can have a glimpse of that in this service today I hope, allowing our senses to drink in all the beautiful God-ness around.

So I would ask, how is your relationship with God? Don't worry, I am not going to get you to stop and turn to your neighbor to chat like I did last time I was up here, but if you do want to answer that question, let's make a time in the coming week to have tea! How is your relationship with God? Like any relationship, it takes some investment, some willingness, some movement. If you aren't feeling connected, try something new. Maybe prayer is new for you, and you feel self-conscious about it. Try it anyway. Not because the Bible says, or Ingrid says, or there is some big *should* hanging over your head. But because we are invited into relationship with the God that loves us. Try reading the Bible or coming to bible study. Try out healing touch or Jazz Vespers. Read a Barbara Brown Taylor or Emmet Fox book. Seek. You might just find.

Two years ago my husband and I bought a house in Coquitlam – previous to that we had a townhouse in Vancouver, and my mom lived about a 10 minute drive away. When we moved into our new house, she moved into our suite. We had been in the habit of calling each other in the day, emailing or texting, making plans for dinner or weekend brunch. We intentionally worked on our relationship. After about a year and a half of living together, Mom and I were struggling in our relationship and we realized that

we had stopped seeking each other out, we knew the other was just right there and our lives had become woven together and it was good, but we were lacking in that intentional intimacy.

Maybe you have become totally comfortable in the faith that God is always there. And that faith is amazing. And you are still invited into an active relationship with God. What could you do to reinvigorate your prayer life? How could you serve in a different way? Try something new. Seek.

It is in the seeking that we enter into relationship. My sermon is entitled Friend or Acquaintance and I have been trying to think of how to best express the difference. What comes to mind are fireworks. How many of us have seen fireworks on tv – New Years eve or something similar. Pretty? Sure. Awesome? Hardly. But have you ever been down on or near the water, right underneath a big professional display? Wow right? The difference is like night and day. Friend or acquaintance?

Going back to our Scripture reading, the Gospel writer records that Jesus prayed,
“Father, it’s time.

Display the bright splendor of your Son
So the Son in turn may show your bright splendor.
You put him in charge of everything human
So he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge.”

Ah, eternal life – different explanation of what that is in the different Gospels, and according to different Pastors, Ministers, theologians, but here we have what is the clearest and simplest explanation of what that actually is:

“And this is the real and eternal life:
That they know you,
The one and only true God,
And Jesus Christ, whom you sent.”

Eternal life is to know God and Jesus. It is that simple. Does that change the way that you think about life with God today? To understand that knowing God does not equal doctrinal knowledge, cognitive constructions, creedal consents or specific knowledge. Knowing God is seeking God. And the simplest way of seeking is just to pray.

What we don’t have as part of our reading this week is the beautiful end to this prayer Jesus is offering in the presence of the disciples:

“I have made your very being known to them – who you are and what you do – and continue to make it know, so that your love for me might be in them exactly as I am in them.”

Prayed for those disciples more than 2000 years ago, and prayed for each one here today. That God might continue to reveal Godself to us, overflowing us with love, born out of relationship.

May we graciously receive and then pass it on.

Amen.