

Sixth Sunday of Easter

April 27, 2008

Lessons: Psalm 66:7-18; Acts 17:22-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

Today is the Sixth Sunday of Easter. Next Sunday will be the last Sunday of the Easter Season. For the last six weeks we have read and shared the stories of Jesus' resurrection and his appearing to his disciples. We have heard of the various ways that Jesus comforted and encouraged those who had given their lives and hopes to him.

Today's Gospel is part of what is referred to as Jesus' Farewell Discourse, which began last Sunday. Today we heard Jesus make two very important points. Points that we want to remember. Points that make it very clear how the disciples love for Jesus would play out in their everyday lives.

Today we heard Jesus say:

"If you love me you will obey what I command." "If you love me you will obey what I command..."

Scottish Professor William Barclay wrote:

"To John there is only one test of love and that is obedience. It was by his obedience that Jesus showed his love of God; and it is by our obedience that we must show our love of Jesus...To Jesus real love is not an easy thing. It is shown only in true obedience."

Obedience to Jesus' commands is important, and we do it because we love Jesus, not in order to earn our way to Heaven. We obey his commands because of love and because we want to. But as William Barclay reminds us, it is not an easy thing to do.

But do you remember what Jesus said after his comment on obeying? His words are very important if we are to do what he calls us to do. We heard:

"If you love me you will obey what I command." And then he said: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth"... "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever..."

Think about that. Because this portion of today's Gospel initiates a series of readings and lessons that we will hear often over the next two weeks. We first hear this mentioned today, then we will hear it mentioned again on Thursday of this week, which is Ascension Day. And we will hear it mentioned again next Sunday and then we will hear it mentioned on the following Sunday, the Day of Pentecost. These lessons emphasize a

critical factor in our Christian life. *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever...”*

Let me share a portion of what we will read on Wednesday, Ascension Day, from the first chapter of Acts:

“(Jesus) appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

“... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

“They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’”

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples for many days, teaching them and encouraging them. And then he left them..... What do you think the disciples felt? What was going on in their hearts and minds? What were they expected to do? And very importantly, what are *we* expected to do? Listen to these thoughts from The Rev. Sam Portaro. He writes:

“We drove most of the way in silence, my father delivering me, his eldest son, to college. Arriving on campus, we found the dorm, and I was registered. We moved my few belongings up the stairs to the second –floor corner room, pausing only long enough to be introduced to one or two others at similar tasks. In a matter of minutes the job was done. My father gave me a quick embrace and vanished, down the stairs and gone. It was as though he had disappeared, leaving me in a new place-in every sense.

“There comes a time in every loving relationship when we have to let go. My father knew that. He handled the moment with a swift grace, minimizing the pain and, simultaneously, signaling that some partings are meant for joy. It was his way of saying, ‘The time has come for which we have prepared. You are ready now.’”

“In that important moment and his leave-taking, that was completely out of my control, I was, at one and the same time, in control. My life, for which my parents will always feel responsibility, was no longer in their control. My life was now mine in a way it had never been before.

“Such moments come to our lives, when we must step out boldly and take responsibility for who and what we are. These times are filled with fear and sadness that comes of loss... and change.. yet to come.

“The relating of the Ascension event in Acts demonstrates, with (Jesus’) leaving, some affirmation of our staying. His going is the intimation of his return. Jesus did say that those who remained would receive power in the form of the Holy Spirit, and they would find within that power their ministry as witnesses to the power of God. Those were his very last words...” Think about that: “those who remained would receive power in the form of the Holy Spirit, and they would find within that power their ministry as witnesses to the power of God. Those were his very last words”. Portaro continues:

“What would be given (the disciples) was the gift of responsibility, the gift of participation in the life of God’s kingdom to come. They were being welcomed into a strange and wonderful world. They stood with two angels, who delivered the words of welcome. The symmetry with the story of Genesis is unmistakable. They were invited to return to the work of creation, to take up the legitimate labor of the people of God. They were given back all that had been taken away when...their forebears had been banished and barred by angels, like those who now beckoned them to enter into service...

“(The disciples)... saw the gift of his leaving. The Ascension is God’s affirmation of us, God’s own profession of faith, hope and love... for us and the world. As such, the Ascension is the mass ordination of all ministries. It is the transfer of responsibility from one to another, as God gives over to us the fullness of life promised in Jesus.”

When you think about the Holy Spirit, what comes to your mind? How often are you conscious of the gift that has been offered to you? How often are you conscious of what you are being called to do?

During these next two weeks, read and listen very carefully to what the words in each of the readings are saying, and very importantly, listen to what they are saying to you. Think about the words we just heard from Sam Portaro: “The disciples were invited to return to the work of creation, to take up the legitimate labor of the people of God.” And so are we.

During these next two weeks, ask yourself how these words and promises are part of **your** life. And remember the words spoken to you at your Baptism, when someone placed their hands on your head and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit”.

AMEN