

Friendship with Jesus/God/Holy Spirit: Homily Sunday, May 26, 2019

There are many questions that today's reading from the gospel of John that arose for me. This selection from what has been called Jesus "farewell address" to his followers has many significant themes but not least among them are love, friendship and the developing future relationship between the Divine (big three) and Jesus followers.

The writer(s) of this gospel, we are told, was probably part of a group of Jewish worshippers referred to as the Johannine community, that developed between 70-90 CE, perhaps in the city of Ephesus.

The writer(s) pulled together many of the scattered sayings and activities of Jesus and selected those that would best suit the circumstances of this community. They were no longer able to be part of the Jewish worshipping synagogue and they were certainly suspects in the wider Roman culture that worshipped the Emperor. How to sustain themselves as faithful followers of Jesus the Christ was the major issue facing them.

No doubt they had hoped to continue on as part of the Jewish community however their belief that Jesus was the Messiah was not accepted. But, while the gospel of John often refers to "the Jews" in negative ways, remember the writer is talking about his own people and that puts a different slant on it.

In this part of the farewell address, Jesus prepares his followers to "go on without his earthly presence." And today we hear one of his many revelations of how they will support and be able to continue on in his ministry. The first part of this address Mona spoke about last week, which serves as the baseline: they and we are called forth to "love one another, just as" I (Jesus) have loved you." Easier said than done we know!! Without looking around at our gathering today, we know how challenging each of us can be to love 24/7....and that includes ALL of us!

Getting over that hurdle is enough but today's scripture notes that Jesus is promising some help. Not only does he commit himself and his (heavenly)Father that they will come and "make our home with" those that love him but that the Advocate or Holy Spirit will be sent in his name and will teach and guide the community.

What Jesus is offering this beleaguered congregation is the promise that they will be guided and not abandoned. Is that help available to us??

So, up to now, the community has been following the works and words of Jesus, within the structure of the writings of the Torah, prophets and psalms. The concept of Yahweh is not new but the advent of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Risen Christ is AND now we have the Holy Spirit or the Advocate coming on board in a very active a positive way.

Over time the "organized church" translated the complexity of the relationship between and among the Creator (God), the Son (Jesus) and the Advocate (Holy Spirit) as the Trinity...God in three persons.

Backtracking a bit in time, o any of you remember the "water example" from church school: Ice—liquid water—vapour; or the three leaf clover...

Most of these showed how they were really one. Today, however, we hear how this is more about the relationship among the three aspects of the Divine and how intimately they are connected and relate to one another.

Whether or not we can understand this cosmic connection fully is a challenge and trying to wrap our minds around the concept of eternity stretches things a bit as well. It is comforting to have contemporary physics tell us that there is no end to the life cycle (which as believers in eternal life we have accepted on faith); but trying to grasp, for example, the assertion that there are billions of galaxies out there, far beyond this "third rock from the sun." This is most humbling and wonderful!

So, for today, recognizing that complexity, let us start from where we are, here on terra firma and use the life stories and sayings of Jesus to help us.

And let me change pronouns and use the word US...for his words are for today's followers as well.

It seems to me, not just because Jesus said it but that his life demonstrated it with deeds. Here he is not only letting his followers then and now, know that he is not abandoning us when he leaves/dies, as he knows he will. The love he has for us and that we have for him and for one another will enable us to always be part of his eternal life. Knowing that we love him and that he regards us as his friends, he has been showing us, teaching us, all he knows from God. He says later in this farewell address (John: 15:15) I do not call you servants for I have made known to you everything I have heard from my father (later he tells Mary Magdalene in the garden in the first appearance after his crucifixion:(John 20:17) Go tell them I am going to my father and your father. There is no exclusivity with Jesus!

Within this farewell address, there are two clear statements about how Jesus views his followers—they are his friends and that God, who is called here "Father" is our Father/God/Creator as well.

So: what do you and I know about friendship? Who is our close friend and why do we name them as close, even intimate friends? Is it mutual?

...that is a rhetorical question, of course, it is!

Is your friend trustworthy, loyal, supportive, do you share things with your friend—celebrate—confide—concerns—

....do you spend time with your close friend—keep in touch

...do you love your friend?

These are questions I continually raise about my relationship with Jesus!

I remember as a teenager going to church early for our YPF meeting so I could sit alone in the chancel, which was in semi darkness...and just be there quietly. No agenda, but "being close to God." Or later, finding my way in the woods at our Robert Creek's Girl Guide chapel in the

woods...a natural chapel. Today I see the forest and seashore the same way...a chapel...a sacred space...

I suspect if someone said I was contemplating or meditating back then I might have been surprised ...what was that?? But in those days we had forgotten about our Christian heritage of the Desert Mothers and Fathers and the early monastic communities that arose to just "be" and to meditate, contemplate and pray. Just as Jesus did I suspect when he went apart "to be"...

But underneath all this is the overwhelming evidence that God with Jesus and the Spirit within and around us, we have all that we need to continue the work as that little Johannine community had hundreds of years ago.

My question for you and me today is: how are we actively going about re-claiming this relationship that Jesus is offering to us in friendship; this gift that assures us we are not alone, we are never without the embrace of the Divine in all aspects: On the front page of our bulletin we see this wonderful icon from our Eastern Christian branch called The Trinity. It symbolizes how they are together on a level playing field, they are at- one- ment and there is an open space at this table....for all of us—

Don't walk in front, I may not follow, don't walk behind, I may not lead...just walk beside me and be my friend...

Amen

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