

Jesus Prayed that We May be One

Last week I suggested that God's love is like a giant armchair in which, it turns out, we have been sitting all along. But sometimes we forget that we are held by that chair, safe and secure. We think we must sustain our own weight as if, in that armchair, we insist upon standing on one leg, the other crossed over our knee, wobbling to maintain control. We neglect to realize that we are asked sink into the chair's own strength and support. I also argued that Jesus seemed to say that the way to abide with a deep consciousness of the reality of that chair, of God's unwavering love for us, is by loving others. In loving others, we discover how much we are loved with a love that will not fail us and we discover how to abide in a place of deep joy.

As I drove home from church last week, I lamented somewhat that it had been a largely philosophical sermon, so today I want to start with a story as a bridge between the gospel from last week and the gospel from this week.

A couple weeks ago I attended an event where I got to see my friend Natalie again for the first time in many months. Natalie and I met at church a couple years ago and we knew each other casually. But all of a sudden, our paths overlapped in a significant way in our discernment process. We both landed placements at the same church across town, and we concurrently entered an intense training cohort at

Harborview Hospital. Our days meandered in and out of serving liturgically and serving at bedsides. We shared experiences of navigating complex trauma with our patients: suicide attempts, sudden brain deaths, child fatalities, amputations, and significant mental illness. We also shared the bread and the cup at church. It was an experience that taught me to believe that trauma isn't limited to hospital rooms, that trauma is probably all around us, including those sitting in the pews and those serving at the table.

Natalie and I did our best to be there for each other, while learning how to be there for others. Perhaps because of the intensity of that time my bad habits of comparison and competition kind of diminished and I learned how to be even more vulnerable in a close friendship, and how to receive care and wisdom when I felt overwhelmed or incompetent. I explored ways to provide care when my friend was exhausted and juggling more than felt humanly possible. Now, when I see movies where a former soldier talks about a friendship forged in the trenches, I think of my friend Natalie and of that intense season we shared.

So, a few weeks ago, when I was driving to the event where I would see Natalie again, I started to cry. It wasn't sorrow. It was the joy of anticipation, the joy of deep friendship. It was the joy of knowing that in forming a friendship like that, I had learned something about

that great armchair that holds us all. When we allow others to matter in that way, we learn something about how God loves us and what God wants us to experience. We learn the value of being one, one with God and one with each other.

We see this desire of God on our behalf in the prayer Jesus prayed shortly before he was betrayed and crucified. His words are drenched with tenderness for his disciples, “I am asking on their behalf...on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.” Jesus intercedes for them and entreats that they be protected, knowing that he will be leaving and can no longer protect them in the same way he had been. He prays, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” He relates them to himself, saying, “...the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” and also praying, “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

Jesus clearly cares for his disciples. He takes seriously the way they have journeyed with him and chosen to believe the truth he shared with them about who he was and about the kingdom of heaven. He knows that their belief and their entry into a different way of living puts them at odds with a world marked by deep, systemic problems. A world that encourages people to form factions, to create enemies, and

to compete for resources. The disciples had been learning how to love in new ways, to love their enemies, to see God in those who were not like them, and to abandon religious arguments that declared some people unredeemable. These faithful followers had been entering the reality of the kingdom of heaven while all around them religious infighting, political oppression, and rampant inequities raged on.

As Jesus thinks about no longer remaining on earth, he considers how it will be for those he leaves behind him, for the women and men who sacrificed much to follow him, and who will encounter much of the same rage that had been directed at Jesus. They must continue in faith, but without his physical companionship. And so, he prays for them. He prays for their protection, he prays that his joy may be complete in them, he prays that they would be one as God is one, and that their oneness would be the most powerful testimony of all that Jesus was indeed sent into the world and loved them.

It is a little tragic that today's gospel reading ends before the prayer is complete. It is in the last lines of the prayer that Jesus talks about the disciples sharing in the unity that the Trinity enjoys. "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" he says, and again, "I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one..." The oneness is in God. We are enfolded within God's own perfect unity and completeness.

And because that is true, we are one with one another. We are held within the perfect embrace of God, and therefore we are one, whether we acknowledge it or not.

There is so much to distract us from that truth. There is so much around us that insists that our differences make us incompatible as a human family. There is so much that proclaims that those people over there, are a threat to us. That Palestinians are robbing Israelis of the land God exclusively gave them. That the poor of South and Central America who flee violence to travel north to the U.S. are not our concern. That the people who voted for Trump, or the people who voted for Biden, depending upon one's own political tribe, are little more than idiots and unworthy of respect. All sorts of divisions manifest around racial, ethnic, gender, political, sexual, and class identities.

This fundamental resistance to entering oneness with God and each other has been evidenced throughout time. When someone told a story about how long this has been going on, how endemic this is to the human condition, they imagined a man and a woman in a garden, suddenly unable to meet God because of their own shame, and then unable to stand before God without finding someone to blame. The story of Adam and Eve is a story about fragmentation and the inability to recognize that we are held, together, in God's embrace.

And Jesus says, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us...completely one...” Jesus invited his disciples into a radically different way of understanding themselves in relationship to God and each other. He knew that this would get them into trouble with a world that insisted on fragmentation.

And yet, when we abide in that trinitarian unity, we cannot help but reach out in love because we recognize how we are all held together in love by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when we love in authentic and transformational ways – as I discovered in my friendship with Natalie - our joy is increased because we are able to taste of the goodness of what it is to be one as God is one.

Violence surrounds us. Violence proclaims itself to be the ultimate truth. But it is not. Jesus has drawn us into the holy Trinity and declares God’s love greater than all forces intent on death.

So, let us center ourselves around this table and in the eucharistic feast. May we be present to the way in which we are in Christ, and Christ in us – and may we commit to seeing how Christ is also in each other. May we be one.