

7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR B

May 12, 2024 – All Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah

Psalm 1; Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; 1 John 5:9-13;

John 17:6-19

In the Name of our Creator, our Redeemer, our Holy Sustainer.

This is a very special Sunday for us—in so many ways! Yes, we celebrate Mother’s Day—a day that can bring great joy and gratitude, a day that can also bring sadness when our mothers are no longer here with us, or a day that can bring hurt for those women who have been unable to have children. So, we really should celebrate all women nurturers of children whether they are our own biological children, our adopted children, or children we tend to with our hearts—or men nurturers who step in when there are no women. May our Blessed Lord bring strength, humor, courage, stamina, and joy to all who live under this umbrella of love.

This is also the last Sunday of Easter, the Sunday after Ascension Day that happened this last Thursday, and the Sunday before the Day of Pentecost—the birthday of the church!!! There was a time when Ascension Day was a day of obligation—at least in my old home parish where my Dad was the rector! To remind us of its importance, here is the collect for Ascension Day written by Steven Shakespeare:

“God unheld by word or wall; power of love beyond all lords of war: lift us from dullness and cynical contempt; make us ready for your Spirit of transforming fire; and turn our hearts to the

mending of the world; through Jesus Christ, the name above all names.” Amen (Shakespeare, p. 24)

Ascension Day marked the 40th day in Eastertide. Ascension Day signified that the earthly mission of Jesus was complete, finished.

Mark declares in his Gospel”

“The Lord Jesus after he had spoken to [the disciples], was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere.” (16:19-20)

In Luke we hear:

“Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” (24:50-53)

The disciples and followers of Jesus finally got it!!! No longer were they huddled in fear and despair. All the stories, parables, acts of healing, and teachings of Jesus were understood in their hearts and minds. His ascension changed everything.

My Dad put it this way:

“Our Lord was ‘earth bound (limited by space and his humanity) until he ascended. He could not have used His full power if He remained here—subject to the limitations of space and time. He could not have been at Jerusalem and

at the same time Antioch, Rome, London, Chicago, or even Salt Lake City. Because of his heavenly Ascension, our Lord is now equally joined with all his disciples, wherever in this world they may be.

Perhaps you have not thought of this reality, but Christ could not have been mystically or sacramentally present, if He had been physically and materially present. For example, our Lord could NOT be present at Mass here at All Saints, Canterbury Cathedral, St. Peter's in Rome, the Fiji Islands, at the same time, if He had not first ascended . . . and taken his . . . place 'at the right hand of God.' Imagine our supremely catastrophic loss if Christ's Presence in the Blessed Sacrament were not available to us at our church altars!—in our hearts, minds, souls—we would then die of spiritual malnutrition!

He could not have sent to us his Holy Spirit unless He Himself had not first gone away. His disciples had to learn to stand by themselves with and in the strength of his representative, God the Holy Spirit.”

So why does the reading from John's Gospel take us back to the night of the Last Meal with Jesus and His disciples? Has there been a glitch in the selection for today's Gospel reading? Easter has been with us for 43 days!!!! So why this selection????

First, we have to step back again to Chapter 16 in John. Remember: Jesus is talking with his disciples. Jesus had already told them he was the true vine and they must abide in love with

God and himself as they followed the Great Commandments. Last Sunday Jesus called them no longer master and servants, but friends. In Chpt. 16, Jesus warns them what following Him will mean: these disciples “will [be] put out of the synagogues. Indeed an hour is coming when those who hate you will think that by doing so are offering worship to God.” (16:2)

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth [Jesus says]: it is your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate [Holy Spirit] will not come to you.” (16:7)

When the disciples still seem puzzled, Jesus said:

“Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. (DID JESUS KNOW THIS WAS MOTHER’S DAY???) So you have pain now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (16:20-22)

Jesus spoke to them plainly and they rejoiced in their new understanding—fresh with realization of what was to come. Then, Jesus certainly brought a harsh reality to them:

“The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone . . . in the world you face persecution. But take courage, I have conquered the world.” (16:32)

Pretty powerful words! What the disciples must have thought at this moment with Jesus. Then suddenly Jesus begins to pray to God. He no longer engages them in conversation or dialog. John gives us a glimpse of his conversation with God. Not only did the disciples witness this, but we also get a sense of this prayer for us, don't we? Does he spend time on himself? NO!!! Jesus gives over his followers to God. He asks God on the disciples' behalf to take care of them, give them strength, and protect them from the world and all its temptations and harm.

As Jesus was not a part of the world, so he says the disciples and followers are not to be. He knew the world hated Him and, in turn, would hate his followers, but Jesus did not ask God to rescue them from the world, to have that sudden chariot ride that Elijah had! Jesus asked God to protect them from the evil one (or from just evil as some translations have it)—just as we pray in the Lord's Prayer every Eucharist, almost every service, almost every day: "Sanctify (bless) them in the truth; your word is truth."
(17:17) Then we are suddenly included with these witnesses of the life of Jesus. In the next verses that follow today's Gospel reading, Jesus says:

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."
(17:20-21)

Had you realized that you here at All Saints appear in Scripture? Did you know that we have been connected with the disciples and

all who have come into this life? What a wonderful gift to have an actual place in our beloved Scripture! Biblical scholar Gail R. O'Day writes: "We are a community for whom Jesus prays." Imagine . . .

Prayer is a two-sided conversation. Sometimes we get caught up with our petitions—Help me, help so and so; our deal makings—Please God, let such and such happen and I will NEVER, EVER do such and such again!!!; or our asking for strength in the darkness of a lonely night; that we forget this part—Jesus prays for us. IMAGINE!!! Not only are we worthy enough to be loved by God, but we are prayed for all the time. Never are we abandoned. Despite the fact that Jesus knew what was going to happen to him, Jesus thought of all of us. If Jesus had not ascended, however, "He could not hear all our prayers simultaneously—thanksgivings, adorations, confessions, intercessions, and petitions. The theoretical loss of the Holy One's ability to receive our prayers is too awful to contemplate."—again from my Dad.

Jesus finished his earthly work and left us to continue on with his teachings. These have been passed on in oral traditions, preserved on gold-paged Bibles, shared with families and friends, and used within our Book of Common Prayer and Lectionary. We have been given responsibility to take our Christian belief and faith seriously. We are to do whatever we can in our daily lives—not just on special events—but in our every waking moment to do what we can to carry on what Jesus wants and needs us to do.

I usually give simple suggestions for people to follow: a simple “Hi” to a stranger; a turning to someone we really don’t know and giving them a smile, etc., etc. This time I am going to be a bit bolder and suggest that each of us take pen and paper to hand—yes, I know that is incredibly old-fashioned, but still worthwhile—and take a moment and write to a local synagogue or both of them and express your support for the Jewish people—stay out of the political scene about the Israeli govt.—but express your concern about the rise in antisemitic rhetoric and violence; tell the Rabbi and his/her congregation that you are an ally and don’t support this negative behavior. Then, write to one or two of the Islamic Centers and express your support of the people who are suffering in Gaza and beyond, and that you would like to be considered an ally as well. If we are going to curb the negativity surrounding this, then I believe that we need to do something. What will it cost? Postage and paper. What will it give you? The sense that you can make a difference by doing this. What better way to close this year’s celebration of Easter! This, I believe, supports the call of Jesus to love one another and to abide in God’s Love as God abides in ours. Just a thought from the pulpit this morning.

So, remember that next Sunday is the Birthday of the Church—PENTECOST, THE 50TH DAY AFTER EASTER! Due to the fact that Easter was early this year, Pentecost will be as well. Usually, it’s in early June. It does not matter. Get your red clothes organized and show up and dazzle this Sanctuary with the different hues and shades that will liven up All Saints. Have a wonderful celebration!

Let us pray:

“Sanctifying God, your gift to us is one who overcame the system which enslaves and feeds upon the victim: send us to your world to speak the truth of peace, to stand with those who suffer, to show another way; through Jesus Christ, the life of all things.”
(Steven Shakespeare, p. 60)