

Sermon

Easter 6B

Acts 10:44-48; Ps. 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

On the Church calendar, there are only four more days before Jesus leaves us. This Thursday is Ascension Day, 40 days after Easter, and the day Jesus ascended to heaven leaving his disciples alone. If we go back through the Lectionary, we will see a pattern leading up to that day and the end of the Easter season.

Easter Day, of course, is all about the Resurrection. Easter 2 is Jesus' encounter with the disciples and, specifically, Thomas. Easter 3 is yet another encounter with Christ: the road to Emmaus, the post-Emmaus encounter, and Jesus on the beach after the catch of 153 fish. But then, from Easter 4-7, we get pre-crucifixion stories: the good shepherd, many dwelling places, the true vine, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the new commandment, receiving God's peace, and outtakes from the Farewell Discourse. The first three weeks are specifically resurrection stories. The next four are "preparation for departure" stories.

Jesus is leaving town and leaving us in charge, and the readings from Easter 4-7 let us know what is expected of us. These lessons tell us how we are supposed to behave. Here's a hint: we aren't throwing a party like "Risky Business." So let's look at today's lessons to guide us.

The passage from Acts comes at the end of Chapter 10 in which Peter has a vision of many animals, both clean and unclean, being shown to him with instructions to "kill and eat." This happens three times, and three times he refuses; but three times a voice says, "What God has made clean you must not call profane."

Peter tells a group of people about this and says, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality."

The passage today is an extension of that vision and interpretation. Circumcised believers, i.e. Jews who were followers of The Way, were shocked . . . SHOCKED I tell you . . . that Gentiles received the same gift they had received from God. Peter, putting into practice what his vision taught him, orders the outsiders to be baptized. This reminds us that Jesus has other sheep that do not belong to this fold that will be brought in.

In the passage from 1 John, we hear that everyone who believes Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. John goes on to say that we love God when we obey his commandments. And what are those commandments? Love God. Love neighbor. Love one another as Jesus has loved you.

The conquering of the world that John speaks of is not a military conquest. It's not subduing our enemies. It's not even a situation where Christians dominate politics to create a theocracy. It's none of those because all of those lead to an abuse of power and marginalization/mistreatment of those to whom you are opposed.

The conquering of the world comes through our faith, through loving God, neighbor, and each other. It comes through fighting for justice, equality, respect, and seeing others – all others whether black, white, gay, straight, transgender, male, female, native or immigrant – as beloved children of God.

In the gospel we are once again told by Jesus what is expected of us: to love one another as he loved us. We have been chosen by Christ to do this new thing: to love as God loves. We have been appointed to bear fruit that will last; and the fruit that lasts is the fruit of love.

What is based on hate, discrimination, or delineated lines of us and them is bound to fail. What is based on violence is bound to fail. They will fail because they are based on wrong views of God. The right view of God is based on love, and it is only love and light which will conquer the world.

All of this was new to the disciples and those early followers of Christ. Proclaiming that God's law was the law of love was a new take on the Mosaic law. Expanding that law to welcome and include outsiders was new for Peter and the others. Reiterating that law in his letters was new for John.

And if we think this is now old hat and that we've got it all figured out, well . . . I've got news for you – we don't. We still see people punished for simply existing. Poor and homeless people are prosecuted for being poor and homeless. Non-whites are denied the same basic rights as whites. Domestic violence victims are primarily women and children. And too often God is used as a weapon to demonize and tear people down.

These actions and policies do not reflect the love of God. This does not reflect how Jesus taught us to live. As our soon-to-be retired Presiding Bishop has said, "If it's not about love, it's not about God."

Another way of saying that is that if something or someone does not reflect the love of God and Christ, then that something or someone is antichrist.

Let us understand it is not our job to bar anyone from having access to God. Let us work to conquer the world for God. Let us understand that the world will only be conquered through the power and light of love. These are all things which the world despises and fights against.

But through it all, let us follow the advice of Ps. 98 and sing a new song. Let us sing the song of love. The voices of hate are loud. The song of love must be louder.

Amen.

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