

7th Sunday of Easter (Memorial Day), yr. a, 5/24/2020
Acts 1:6-17, 21-26; John 17: 1-11
So, Now What Happens? – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

Jesus prays for his disciples – prays for us – as he is about to face death. He prays to God his Father: All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ... Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one – one heart and mind – as we are one. ... now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves – among themselves.

Think of it; Jesus, the Son of God, God made flesh and who lived among us in this world, is glorified in us – his followers, his disciples. And Jesus prays that God protect us, guard us, that we may be one as he and God are one. The other day it suddenly hit me between the eyes that if Christ has been glorified in you, glorified in me, and if God is glorified in each and every human being made in the image of God, then that changes everything for me, for you, for every one of us. We can no longer live the way we live, make the choices we make, say the things we say, do the things we do, as if it doesn't matter – doesn't matter to me or you or anyone else. And I'm not just talking big choices, or the grand, extraordinary, seemingly important things we say and do; I'm talking about every little day-in-and day-out, ordinary things. The respect and courtesy we show one another – when driving, shopping, working, listening, speaking, doing the dishes, disposing of our trash, resolving our conflicts, sharing our food, and one another's company. All the ways in which we rejoice with those who are

rejoicing, weep with those are weeping. It all matters, because God in Christ is glorified in you, and anything I say or do or choose either honors the glory of God in others or diminishes it.

A favorite writer of mine, Marilyn Robinson, was interviewed when her book "Lilia" was released, and she said something which I wrote down in my journal and come back to again and again: "The idea is that there is an intrinsic worth in a human being. Abuse or neglect of a human being is not the destruction of worth, but certainly the denial of it. Worth. We're always trying to anchor meaning in experience. But without the concept of worth, there is no concept of meaning. ... I can't make a human being worthy of my respect; I have to assume that he is worthy of my respect." (NY Times, 10/05/2014 magazine)

"...that they all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us."

To live our lives rooted in this assumption that each human being is worthy of respect, to live our lives in such a way that Jesus is glorified in us - made visible to others by the way we live; to do this requires us to sacrifice, to let go of the things and feelings that center on us and orbit around us. It may even mean letting go of our feelings of outrage at what is wrong or unjust, to give of ourselves for the sake of the glory of God in others - just as Jesus did. Letting something deeper than our personal experience and communal experience make

meaning, bring worth to our lives. That something deeper is a trust in the image of God in others.

An example: Driving. I consider myself a good and courteous driver who pays attention, (although sometimes those who ride with me might disagree.) But other drivers can drive me crazy. I can find myself muttering under my breath, when they don't yield, or when they speed up, or cut in front of me, or tailgate, or even pass me. I feel my adrenaline surge and my heart beat faster. Pretty soon I can feel as if most other drivers are careless and are obstacles to where I want to be. And if I pay attention, I soon catch myself driving like those OTHER drivers; as if I need to assert myself, make my presence felt, take what I'm entitled to. The only way I can restore peace of mind and equanimity is to let go of my outrage, sacrifice my sense of being tread upon and my space and right to get where I want with no one in my way – let it all go and be as considerate to the other driver as I would like him (or her) to be to me. I need to sacrifice my need to be satisfied and even justified. Sacrifice my need to assert myself and let others know, "Hey, I'm here. Don't tread on me!"

It's hard to be content with our lives for very long. After awhile dissatisfaction, restlessness, an anxiety sets in. It seems like there should be something more. We should be able to get ahead and stay ahead. The more we have the happier we should be. Nothing stays perfectly clean or perfectly peaceful, someone or something always messes it up. We get sick or a loved

one gets sick, a pandemic takes hold, and it feels like an imposition, a burden, a threat, a judgment. And we are found, and we find ourselves, wanting. Wanting what others have, wanting our freedom back, wanting others not to see how we have fallen short of our own standards, wanting others to love and care about us, wanting others to ...wanting, wanting, wanting.

St. Augustine described it this way; “You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” Jesus in his prayer for his disciples before he was betrayed and crucified described it; “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ... I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them ... as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

We are Christians – the disciples of Jesus, the ones for whom Jesus prays, the ones in whom Jesus says he has been glorified, revealed, made visible to others. We are the ones God in Jesus Christ has sent into the world to testify, to give witness with our lives to God’s love for all that God creates – all who are made in God’s image. We are sent into this world to testify to the intrinsic worth of human beings. How do we do this? How do we testify with our lives, that God in Christ may be glorified in us – that others may find their way home to God?

There was a medieval monk called Brother Lawrence who wrote a book *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Brother Lawrence wasn't a learned theologian, or person of authority and position in the church. He was a kitchen worker and cook. He shares in his writing how anyone can practice living in the presence of God in Jesus no matter what their position or job, gifts or limitations. As disciples we do not have to become what we are not. We need only live the lives we are given, doing the work that is given us to do, but doing it for God's sake – in the name of God – and not for ourselves. Everything is holy if we do it for God. But this means we have to make room for God to work in us and through us – by laying down our lives and taking up God's life in Jesus.

I love the account we read in Acts where the disciples of Jesus – the 12 and the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and 120 other believers are gathered together, praying constantly, waiting for what was coming next after the risen Jesus has left them and gone into heaven. The account goes on that Peter stood up and says they must replace Judas to restore their number, to make themselves whole as a community. So the community lifted up two who had been with Jesus from the beginning and were witnesses to his resurrection – Justus and Matthias. They prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart, show us which one." And then they cast lots. It sounds so bizarre, pray then draw straws. Just imagine if we practiced doing God's will, being disciples, that way! Pray and then let it go – surrender our desires, and preferences and judgments and all that we have invested in doing it the way we think best, letting go of our need to

prevail, and surrender it, listening to others and for God's voice, with the view to being one with God and one another.

I wonder what life was like for Justus after he was not chosen to take Judas' place. He was presumably still a disciple, still part of the gathered community of believers. How was Jesus glorified in him, as God was glorified in Jesus? How was Christ's joy made complete – whole – in Justus?

Thomas Merton, a 20th century Trappist monk, wrote in his journal after several years living apart in a hermitage:

It is enough to be, in an ordinary human mode, with one's hunger and sleep, one's cold and warmth, rising and going to bed. Putting on blankets and taking them off, making coffee and then drinking it. Defrosting the refrigerator, reading, meditating, working, praying. I live as my ancestors have lived on this earth, until eventually, I die. Amen. There is no need to make an assertion of my life, especially about it as mine ... I must learn gradually to forget program and artifice. (*Quoted in Ronald Rolheiser, Forgotten Among the Lillies: Learning to Love Beyond Our Fears.*)

Amen.

