

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Psalm 1

1 John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19

The Rev. Susan B. Pinkerton

Interim Priest in Charge, St. Michael's and All Angles Episcopal Church

Corona Del Mar, CA

What Would You Have Jesus Pray for You?

When you approach Grace Cathedral in San Francisco one of the first things you will see is a large labyrinth laid out in front of the entrance to this imposing place of worship. It is a lovely design of stone and marble that invites you to wander through its turning, winding pathways, much like the one we have here to the west of our building. When you enter the cathedral, you are greeted by a second labyrinth of the same design as the one outside. So, whether you are simply wandering outside the cathedral or cross the threshold into this sacred space, you cannot avoid walking on these ancient symbols of the circle and intersecting spiral. Maybe this was the reason for placing one labyrinth within the walls and one outside the walls of the cathedral. They are powerful reminders that we are all on a spiritual journey toward wholeness, the pathway into our interior life where we encounter the great Mystery of God, ever present in our lives. Erasmus, the Renaissance theologian, reminds us that, "Bidden or unbidden God is present."¹ No matter where we are on our spiritual journey God calls us to be in the world, loving God and our neighbor with all our heart, mind and soul.

In today's Gospel reading we witness Jesus 'final prayer for his disciples, his closest friends he will soon leave behind. This is known as Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer." It is Maundy Thursday. Jesus and his inner circle are gathered together in the upper room where they have just shared their last meal. Jesus has gotten on his knees to wash his disciples' feet; Judas has quietly departed to betray the one he loves while Jesus foretells that Peter will deny him three times.² Now, with only a few hours left on this earth, Jesus turns to God to pray for the disciples' protection and wellbeing, knowing they will soon be going out into the world to spread the message of God's love – dangerous business in a dangerous, brutal world that has fallen far from God's Grace. Not so different from our world today.

Jesus is clear that neither he nor his disciples are of this world. In other words, Jesus is teaching us what it means to be people of God. "They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world" (John 17:16). Jesus goes further and prays that his disciples be *sanctified* in the truth of God's word (John 17:19). Jesus is not talking about some type of holier than thou

¹ Erasmus, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/323449>.

² Debie Thomas, *Journey with Jesus - A Lover's Prayer*, last accessed on May 15, 2021.

piety.³ To sanctify means to literally to be set apart for God’s purposes.⁴ And this setting apart, being sanctified, is a necessity because it enables them to be in the world but not corrupted by it. Only then can the disciples go out into the world to spread the news of God’s love, sustained and protected by God.⁵ But, Jesus does not stop there. When you read the next couple of verses beyond today’s reading you will see that Jesus expands his prayer to include all future generations. “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one” (John 17: 20,21).

Jesus is praying for you and me. He is praying that we will be sanctified by the truth of God’s Word; that, like his disciples, we will be set apart from the brokenness of this world and claim our identity as God’s beloved. Because, as people of God, we are in the world, but we are not of this world. Our baptism is the public affirmation and assurance of our sanctification when we are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever. Jesus prays that we all may be one, unified as the Church here on earth. In short, we are the Church. You and I have been ordained by our baptism to proclaim the Good News to the world through our actions. As St. Francis teaches us, spread the Gospel and use words only if you must.

The labyrinths of Grace Cathedral, both inside or outside the walls, echo the reality of our spiritual journey, a journey where God calls us to “live vitally and faithfully in the world, not owned by it but fully engaged with its needs and its wounds.”⁶ It begins with each one of us showing up and walking the winding pathways of our lives God has set before us. We see this in our reading from Acts. Peter assumes the role of leader as the disciples transition into their mission to go out into the world sharing the Good News as Jesus taught them.

However, sometimes we may we reach a dead end and must choose another path. Other times the path we have chosen takes us to places and experiences we never could have imagined. But no matter where our paths lead us, we are called to reach out to each other in love and compassion along the way. I am not sure who, but someone wisely said that ninety percent of life is showing up – and it is true. Every Sunday morning people show up at St. Michael’s in person or on Zoom. This is important because this is the one day of the week when our entire community comes together as the Living Body of Christ. Together we give thanks and praise to God for the life we have been given. Participating in the Holy Eucharist, which is Greek for “thanksgiving,” we take the host, the Body of Christ, as an acknowledgement that God has a claim on our lives. And, in response, we are called to reach out and share God’s abundant love with those the world has forgotten or discarded. Because they also belong to God. This is what it means to be Church.

³ David S. Cunningham, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 2, Lent through Eastertide*, David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 548.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Thomas H. Troeger, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 2, Lent through Eastertide*, David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 549.

A few years ago, a colleague of mine shared a poem, which captures the power of reaching out in love to our neighbor just as Jesus taught us. When we do lives are transformed, for both the giver and the receiver.

The Communion

Blind and alone she sat on her bed
And sang
An old hymn
From an old church.
She sang for herself.
Her sound came from somewhere
Deep in her being,
To sing was her need.
Her needing made me stop.
And somewhere between her singing
and my stopping
something happened
that had never happened
before.
I entered her room.
I said in faulted Spanish:
I come with God
With Jesu Cristo
For you.
She shook into tears.
I come with the Holy Communion
El Cuerpo
De Jesu Cristo
Por tu.
She began to nod
And her blind, closed eyes wept.
Somehow her desire had reached
Me and the surprise and joy
Could not be contained in words or smiles.
And she said: I was so alone.
And I said: Jesu Cristo has come;
I have come; and I held her
And tried to talk
But we were beyond words.

By C.S. Reach