**The Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020, the Rev. David Ota**

**Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21**

How are you doing after two months of Shelter-in-Place? Are you finding it difficult to maintain your relationships with family, friends and associates? Or are you finding by staying at home that you have more time for phone calls or Zoom meetings to connect?

In a strange way, the Shelter-in-Place life makes me think of how physical separation is not the same thing spiritual separation. We can be physically separated and yet remain relationally connected.

In our gospel lesson for today, the Sixth Sunday of Easter, Jesus in his farewell address to his disciples shares with them that if they love him, they will keep his commandments and will be one with him, even as he is one with the Father. They will be able to do this because he will ask God the Father to send an Advocate to them when he dies who will abide with them forever. This Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Jesus will dwell with them, and empower them to live in the love of God as Jesus did.

An interesting point is when Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” he meant “If you all love me, you all will keep my commandments.” Jesus was speaking to the disciples as a community, and to us as a community formed in his name.

So, after the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the disciples were left as a community of believers empowered by the Spirit. Instead of going their separate ways, they resolved to bear witness to the love of God revealed in Jesus, and to do the things he did.

What would that mean for us today? I believe it means that we strive to live in community caring for others, trusting in God’s love for us and all people. We express our solidarity with Jesus as we live as he lived.

In our lesson from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was in Athens and shared with the people the faith in God through Jesus Christ he had come to know. Paul had come to know God as he was raised in the Jewish faith as a Pharisee. And as a Pharisee he was persecuting Christians when he was blinded by the Risen Lord. And while he was blinded, he was helped by a Christian named Ananias. All this was guided by the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth. And through the ministry of Ananias, Saul became a Christian and was named Paul. Paul needed to be struck down from his hateful way of life, and he also needed to be forgiven and picked up so he could live not for his own ideas, but for God who in Jesus Christ loved him and returned him to a loving person, offering his life for others.

This is the paradigm for us as Christians. At some point, we move from living for ourselves, for our own ideology, for our own way to live for God in Jesus Christ. We have repented from a way of life that was not based in love for others, but based in love for ourselves. We will need to be forgiven, to forgive ourselves from living in the old life, so we may be born anew to live in the Christ life.

Do you remember your own stories of conversion? We all need someone to set us straight, to forgive us and help us start anew. In my case, I was fortunate to have many patient and loving people who loved me as I was growing in my self-awareness. If we can remember those times, when others have helped us to be our best selves, to pick us up when we have fallen, then we can do that for others as well. And when we forgive, when we are patient, when we speak the truth in love and self-knowledge, then the love of God dwells with us.

The practice of loving others is not easy. It means putting aside your own interests and even needs for a time to attend to the interests and needs of another. It means doing the right thing, even though it may be difficult. It means holding your tongue, when you would rather express yourself.

Loving others is only possible if we allow God’s love to fill us in the Spirit. Left to our own efforts, we will fail. And even with God’s help, we will fail to be loving all the time. But it is the Spirit who brings us back to our right selves, and reminds us to repair our relationships by forgiving one another and ourselves.

So saints, as we strive to live the Christ-life, remember and give thanks for the saints who have loved you, been patient with you and forgiven you, so you may know that you are loved by them, by Christ Jesus in the power of the Spirit. And in knowing that you are loved, and have come to your right mind, you may have the same love for others.

In this way, we continue to pass on the love of God found in Christ Jesus even after we are gone in the body.

Amen.

**The Collect**

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**The First Lesson**

**Acts 17:22-31**

Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we too are his offspring.’

Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

**The Response**

**Psalm 66:7-18**

***Jubilate Deo***

7 Bless our God, you peoples; \*
make the voice of his praise to be heard;

8 Who holds our souls in life, \*
and will not allow our feet to slip.

9 For you, O God, have proved us; \*
you have tried us just as silver is tried.

10 You brought us into the snare; \*
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.

11 You let enemies ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water; \*
but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.

12 I will enter your house with burnt-offerings
and will pay you my vows, \*
which I promised with my lips
and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.

13 I will offer you sacrifices of fat beasts
with the smoke of rams; \*
I will give you oxen and goats.

14 Come and listen, all you who fear God, \*
and I will tell you what he has done for me.

15 I called out to him with my mouth, \*
and his praise was on my tongue.

16 If I had found evil in my heart, \*
the Lord would not have heard me;

17 But in truth God has heard me; \*
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

18 Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, \*
nor withheld his love from me.

**The Epistle**

**1 Peter 3:13-22**

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you-- not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

**The Gospel**

**John 14:15-21**

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

**I propose to show that Jesus in his farewell address to his disciples and us reminds us our relationship with Jesus does not depend on physical presence, but on the presence of the love of God in the life of our community, so that as we live in love as Jesus did, we are following his example and obeying his commandments and so are one with Him.**

**In preparation for this coming Sunday’s worship, please pray this coming Sunday’s Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11;**

**The Collect**

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

**The First Lesson**

**Acts 1:6-14**

When the apostles had come together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

**The Response**

**Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36**

***Exsurgat Deus***

1 Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; \*
let those who hate him flee before him.

2 Let them vanish like smoke when the wind drives it away; \*
as the wax melts at the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; \*
let them also be merry and joyful.

4 Sing to God, sing praises to his Name;
exalt him who rides upon the heavens; \*
YAHWEH is his Name, rejoice before him!

5 Father of orphans, defender of widows, \*
God in his holy habitation!

6 God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prisoners into freedom; \*
but the rebels shall live in dry places.

7 O God, when you went forth before your people, \*
when you marched through the wilderness,

8 The earth shook, and the skies poured down rain,
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, \*
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

9 You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance; \*
you refreshed the land when it was weary.

10 Your people found their home in it; \*
in your goodness, O God, you have made provision for the poor.

33 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; \*
sing praises to the Lord.

34 He rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; \*
he sends forth his voice, his mighty voice.

35 Ascribe power to God; \*
his majesty is over Israel;
his strength is in the skies.

36 How wonderful is God in his holy places! \*
the God of Israel giving strength and power to his people!
Blessed be God!

**The Epistle**

**1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11**

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

**The Gospel**

**John 17:1-11**

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.”

“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”