

Seventh Sunday of Easter-May 21, 2023

Gospel Reading: John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6”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. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for 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. 9I 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. 10All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11And 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.

SERMON

Seems like a very long and fussy road trip. “Are we there yet”? “How much farther?”

Consider that the Center of Study of Global Christianity estimates there are 45,000 different Christian denominations. Look closer to home. Not all Lutherans hang out with each other around the communion table. Recently some Methodists have decided not to hang out with other Methodists.

Churches split within and between during the pandemic over questions of meeting in person when the health authorities said there was good reason not to-or over mask wearing-or over vaccination.

There are plenty of groups waving the Christian banner I'd not want to share the back seat with on this long road trip. Teachers of white nationalism or cheerleaders for persecuting LGBTQ people and people of colour aren't the folk I personally want to be "one with", thanks.

God plays the long game- The headlines, headaches and heartaches are real- just not ultimate. Prophets dream of lion and lamb coexisting; neither eating the other for lunch. The prophet's vision calls to mind the phrase Tikkun Olam-the restoration of all things. Paul writes about such of a day even as he referees disputes in the churches he visits.

Jesus' lengthy prayer in John's Gospel feels intimate and soulful. Let's be honest about it, though. We're not reading a verbatim transcript.

John's Gospel is like a jazz version of Jesus' life story, written some sixty years after Jesus's life time. People need to hear Jesus in minor keys and in off time to know him more deeply. The first hearers of John were a splinter group; hassled by the empire and no longer getting along with their own faith group. Already, they were looking back to Paul's appeal that there is a body of Christ we're part of. Already people were looking back at Jesus' first followers too. They knew the political and religious divisions among them. John's hearers and readers knew all about the scrapping over who was supposed to get the corner office when Jesus ascended to the One who sent him.

Jesus' prayer reveals his heart's desire for his people...starting with his first followers and radiating to future generations. The one-ness Jesus prays for

boggles the imagination so maybe a metaphor from creation will get us somewhere.

The world's largest living organism is a male quaking Aspen tree in Utah the scientists named "Pando".

Pando takes up 108 acres-It has a single root estimated to be close to 14,000 years old. From that one root springs some 47,000 trunks.

Ancient. Expansive. One root. Far flung as we might feel, knowing our roots might help. John's Gospel quotes Jesus as saying God loved the world so much that God was willing to risk it all for our sake. Jesus would tell the followers to love as Jesus loved.

The good news amid what seems impossible is that God is merciful and God isn't done—no we aren't there—yet. Yet scripture has this cosmic vision where earth's creatures and the whole mosaic of humanity gathers around the presence of God...when all tears are wiped away and everyone sings in in harmony-praising the God of life and love.

Jesus' prayer in John's Gospel reminds us of where we're headed, and it teaches us it's the root of God's love that gets us there.