

Sermon: "...And it Continues..." 7 Easter (B) John 17:6-19 May 9,(12 (modified version) 2024
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One of the hardest lessons I had to learn as a parent, was the fact that my children, once they reached a certain age, would no longer be in close proximity to what they, and me, had known for the duration of their lives thus far. Their lives would continue, but I would not be at the center of them. Now don't get me wrong, there were times throughout those "formative" years when I wished we were not in close proximity to each other. You know, the times when I wasn't quite sure they had grasped the commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind; and love your neighbor (or brother, or parents, as yourself.

Or on the flipside of that, when their bodies were wracked with pain and a high fever lingered for days and clinging to the responsibility to care for them, fell heavy on my heart. Or when *their* hearts were broken from harsh words and bullying from their peers - or hearts broken... when their "first love" *ended* the relationship. And as a mom, I often wondered if the hatred in the world would leave an indelible mark on them for life.

So perhaps out of my naive way of thinking at the time, or the longing to cling to what I could (supposedly) control came to light, I realized that my children were ultimately not mine to hold onto in the sense that they would never leave. Love for my children was not and could not be contained within a little capsule I had created. My realization came soon enough, and when it DID come time for my children to leave home, I still wasn't quite ready. You see, the promise we make at the time of our children's baptism comes with a responsibility - a responsibility to teach them and raise them in faith.

However, it also means releasing them into the world. And I asked myself: Have I given them enough? Have I given them what they'll need to live in a world that is not always kind, and have I taught them how to hold fast to their faith even in the midst of adversity? Had I reinforced the truth that they are and always will be - a child of God? Do they know that *this*, *this* identity as a child of God can and will carry them over the rough spots in life? And did I teach them that they are part of something much bigger. A

bigger picture. A bigger story of God's love and forgiveness; mercy and grace; all of which continues from generation to generation. Did Evan and Nathan learn what they needed to learn?

In our gospel lesson today, John's Jesus, in his high priestly prayer, is praying to God on behalf of his disciples and followers - and his prayer is *not* necessarily in a very succinct manner:

"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." Whew! In fact, when it comes to this "Lord's Prayer", I couldn't help but think of the Beatles song, *I Am the Walrus*, - (*I am he - as you are he - as you are me - and we are all together!*)

Letting go of the ones you love is not easy. Passing the torch, so to speak, to those who come behind us, isn't easy. Not for us, and according to the gospel lesson today, it wasn't easy for Jesus, either. In this lengthy discourse with God, Jesus is concerned for the people once he leaves. You see, Jesus is anticipating his impending absence (John brings us this story on the night before Jesus is about ready to die) and he (Jesus) is recognizing how much the disciples and other followers have yet to learn.

In this *Lord's Prayer*, Jesus prays that God will watch over them and continue their care. You see, Jesus feels responsible for their well-being, as God has given them to him to love and instruct. And given the timing and context of John's story today, it appears that all is not well in the world and within his small community of believers. Sound familiar? But Jesus reminds the disciples that he *has* given them what they need.

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me. For the words that you gave to me I have given to them - everything you have given me is from you and they received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. They "know" the truth - that Jesus is both human and divine and invites them into this oneness, this unity with the Father and the Son.

The word here for *know*, *gnosko*, suggests a knowing beyond understanding information or knowledge. The word *know*, used in this context, indicates more than revelation. It indicates relationship; an intimate relationship with one another and with God. This part of the passage is a clue as to how John understands Jesus' significance. The main thing here is that Jesus passed on to the believers what he had received from God. The cyclic nature of God's love is never cut off, never ending. Jesus, in other words, is leaving the disciples this longstanding legacy of love and he is leaving this same legacy of love with me, with you and with those who come after us.

The disciples are faced with a world of hostility - hostility that ultimately kills Jesus. And Jesus is concerned that the disciples may be tempted to give up when faced with criticism and adversity. Or that they may face the possibility of disunity among themselves. And not unity for the sake of unity. Unity was not an ideal in itself, but always and only in the context of unity with the Father and the Son. Sometimes there are crazy ideas about what Christian unity looks like. William Loader says for some, unity is an embodiment of the principles of peace according to which everyone is always nice (and therefore usually dishonest) and conflicts are not tolerated (and so, go underground, fester and relationships are severed). True love...and true peace...by contrast, is about making and having space where conflicts can be dealt with, worked through and, if need be, lived with, but in a way which does not turn to destructiveness.

You know, I can't help but think what happens people come together - all of our different personalities, value systems, religious expressions, varied cultures, and how each person changes a little bit from the influences of the others in their lives over time. But today, John's Jesus shares his desire for his followers, disciples, you and me, to be one with him, as he is one with the Father, and how our lives change under the influence of God's love lived out here, and now. In this moment we are given.

Jesus felt such a responsibility for whom God had given him. And we, too, have a responsibility for whom God has given to us - those inside and outside of the church. And, trust me, that responsibility, gets messy sometimes. And when we live in a time when unity and oneness are hard to

find, we must remind ourselves that we have each other. We have supportive people who love us, are there for us, and who are experiencing hardship alongside us. This is part of the continuous love of God - a legacy of love that is lived out in human and divine relationships.

So Evan and Nathan, I am trusting that the same never ending love that I learned as a child and passed on to you and to "you" and to "you" (the kids) ...is enough. Being one with the Father and the Son...is enough. And for all the moms out there and those who have not given birth but have mothered and mentored, you, too, are in this this continual love. And you never have to go it alone...because you are a part of something much bigger - you are a part... of the legacy of God's love. Amen.