

Sent on a Mission
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Readings @ http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Easter/BEaster7_RCL.html

Today's gospel is part of the final discourse in John set after the foot washing on what we call Maundy Thursday. This is a long theological statement by John's community. This lengthy statement lays out a good bit of the basis for our understanding of the Trinity.

This section deals a great deal with the "what" of our relationship with God. In fact John has almost nothing about the "how" of church. Let me give a brief explanation of what I mean.

Over the past two Wednesdays the Wednesday Night Bible Study has been listening to a talk by Fr. Richard Rohr on the early desert fathers. This group that started as hermits with Anthony the Great in the second half of the third century was not interested in doctrine but instead on relationship with God. One of the things we learn from these desert hermits who started what became monastic life is that we often get hung up, especially since the time of Constantine and the early church councils with how. How does this work, how did this happen, how does Jesus' death on the cross lead to our salvation. This leads to fights over doctrine and rules. It leads to a dualistic look at religion where everything is black and white. Rules set down in stone that must be obeyed without question for centuries, even thousands of years.

The desert fathers and many monastic communities today spend their time in prayer and relationship with God, Jesus and the Spirit. This is why I go for retreats to these types of places and why I read most of what comes out of the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Boston. The focus is on relationship with God however you understand God.

What makes the synoptic gospels easier to read is that these tell us the story of Jesus and what he did and taught in simple easy to understand terms. Now that does not mean that following these teachings is easy for it is not. The gospel of John baffles many because his community did not really care about mechanics and focused instead on the relationship between God and Jesus and through that our relationship with God and Jesus. That is what today's passage is trying to teach us.

Today we have what is called the High Priestly prayer. The conversation has shifted from Jesus and the disciples to one between Jesus and God, but done so the disciples can hear. As I often do especially with John I turn to the Message translation. Listen to verses 14-16

14 I gave them your word; The godless world hated them because of it, because they didn't join the world's ways, just as I didn't join the world's ways. I'm not asking that you take them out of the world but that you guard them from the Evil One. They are no more defined by the world than I am defined by the world.

This statement really caught my attention and I have learned that means it is time to examine why. Possibly this is related to several blogs I read this week and the report of the Pew Forum about the continued decline in those claiming membership in a denomination or church.

Being a Christian today is not easy, not if we are truly following the teachings of Jesus. The message of Jesus is just as countercultural today as it was 2000 years ago. One blog I read had the headline, "*If America became a Christian Nation (They Probably Wouldn't Like What it Looked Like.*" This article went on to talk about Jesus' preference for the poor, the widow, the alien, the downtrodden, the sinner over the wealthy and powerful. Basically it talked about the beatitudes as governing principles rather than the market force principles that seem to run our government. Christians that really followed Jesus have never been of this world and when we are shaped by this world the results are rarely very much like Jesus. That is in fact what I think threatens our faith today.

Bishop Michael Curry in a sermon given on a previous Pentecost spoke about how uncomfortable he was in filling out his Facebook profile. His staff had been on his case telling him he needed to be on Facebook, have a blog and Twitter account, our bishop's staff had the same conversation with him. He said that when he came to fill out that blank for religion he started to write simply Christian but then he stopped. He said, "The problem is so many Christians have nothing in common with Jesus Christ and much of the world knows this. So I put down Christian Episcopalian because I figured nobody would know what that meant."

To me it seems fairly obvious that Jesus understood and was telling the disciples that this was not going to be easy. That the message they were called to proclaim went against the power structure. Richard Rohr's point is that we got into trouble when we became the power structure and Christianity became more political the religious. When Christianity is used to gain worldly power I believe that the faith is in trouble.

However while stating the challenges Jesus does not let the disciples off the hook. In fact what ends this passage is a commissioning statement to the disciples.

Listen to verses 17 and 18—"Make them holy—consecrated—with the truth; your word is consecrating truth. In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world. I'm consecrating myself for their sakes so they'll be truth-consecrated in their mission.

Jesus is sending the disciples out on the same mission that he said God sent him on. If the disciples were not nervous yet, I suspect they really started to get uncomfortable at

this point. However throughout this final section of John's gospel he promises that if we stay in union with God we can count on God to support us.

Stop for a moment and think what it means to be consecrated to do God's work. This really is the promise of this passage. What does it mean to you to be consecrated to do God's work? What might that look like? Take a moment and ask God that question. What does this mean to us as a parish? We have answered this in our mission and vision work. I would like to end with a look at these.

CORE VALUES

By our baptism we are all called as ministers in the name of Jesus Christ. In order to live out our baptismal vows we strive to live into these core values with God's help:

WE ARE WELCOMING

With God's help, we accept all whom God has created, respecting the dignity of every human being and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

WE LIVE IN COMMUNITY With God's help, we love and care for one another.

WE WORSHIP

With God's help, we celebrate God's gift of love for all creation through worship that strengthens and sustains our faith, feeds our hunger for God and unifies our gathered community.

WE ARE DISCIPLES

With God's help, we equip our community to carry out the work to which God calls us. We pray that all are transformed from seekers (and believers) into disciples.

MISSION STATEMENT

St. Aidan's mission is to serve as Christ's beacon to all who are drawn to our door and all whose paths we cross.

VISION STATEMENT

St. Aidan's vision is to provide a safe and supportive environment for people of all backgrounds and interests to develop and strengthen their personal and communal relationship with God. God's loving Spirit beckons us to become the body of Christ. Striving for justice and peace in our community and in the world at large, we seek to serve God in all our daily interactions.

To fulfill our vision, St. Aidan's strives to:

- * be an open, inclusive and supportive community of Christians;
- * provide a wide variety of meaningful worship opportunities grounded in the Episcopal tradition;
- * create an environment for vibrant spiritual development and Christian formation to promote discipleship, through a variety of programs that include prayer, study, and reflection for all ages
- * seek active engagement with our local and extended communities and the world at large to act as God's hands in the world. We have been blessed by God with many gifts and seek to share those gifts in partnership with a variety of community organizations both secular and sacred;

* support an active youth organization offering age-relevant worship, outreach, and fellowship opportunities.

This entire final section of John's gospel does not have one bit of doctrine, no rules other than "Love one another as I have loved you." So now our call is to go out and get busy in the world!