

Easter 7 May 12, 2024 “Mother’s Day”

Like most of us, I have been marveling at the start Spring! For me, the blooming trilliums in the woods are always a delight. The greening of the meadows, budding trees, it all presages the lovely landscape and balmy temperatures we will soon enjoy. But then the other day, I think I saw it; the sure sign Spring has come to Vermont: a dead skunk in the middle of the road!

Prayer: Most merciful and glorious God, in this season of Easter joy we hear your word of the Spirit of joy; may this joy open our hearts and souls to your truth. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

As we come to the end of our Easter season, we begin to turn our attention from the life of Jesus to life in Jesus. In a Holy day more honored in the breach than the actual observance, last Thursday is included in our Church calendar as “Ascension Day,” commemorating the fortieth day after the resurrection, the day Jesus is taken up into heaven. Yes, there is a mythological aspect to this notion of ascension, because where exactly does Jesus go? In an ancient cosmological understanding heaven is “up there;” but our modern, scientific picture of the universe, a picture now literally photograph magnificently by the Hubble and James Webb space telescopes, showing us an endless universe filled to the brim with stars and other distant galaxies, not a literal heaven. But the point, I think is not where does Jesus go, but rather that for the early friends and followers of Jesus, he is no longer physically present with them. Throughout this Easter season we have heard of Thomas reaching out to touch Jesus, Jesus eating with the disciples, being there present with them. This was life with Jesus, the life of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels. Now, as the Easter season closes out, Jesus is no longer there, so the the friends and followers of Jesus, our early spiritual ancestors, are learning how to live a life in Jesus. How can they live as Jesus taught? How can they be faithful to Jesus’ mission of love and reconciliation? How can they live in Christ?

One way for them to do this was to go back to the Bible; to look to the scriptures for insight and inspiration. As we heard in the lesson from Acts today, Peter remembered the scriptures and the Holy Spirit that had inspired David and others throughout the history of the people of Israel. It is this spirit, in prayer, that leads these early Christians as they form the basis of their community, seeking an equality and provision for all, that they can live fully in Jesus’ Way of Love. And the community of Christians who gathered in response to John’s witness, those who held John’s Gospel in high regard and sought to live their faith in accord with Jesus’ message of love and eternal life also provide another example of those seek to live a life in Jesus. To these early followers, this testimony would touch their souls, indeed as the writer of the First Letter of John puts it, “Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts,” stressing that now to have life in Jesus is to have that love of God, a love that brings everlasting life into the community.

Finally, living in Jesus for our spiritual ancestors was following the words of Jesus, remembering the truth Jesus has shown them. For these early Christians, this was the way to follow Jesus: in the close relationship Jesus has with God, following Jesus closely also gives us that same close relationship to the divine. This is the truth of Jesus’ Way of Love for our ancestors, and it is a truth given to you and me as well. But there are three more characteristics here too: this truth, that Way of Love Jesus shows his friends, this truth leads to glory, joy and holiness, or in the word of today’s Gospel, “sanctification.” This life in Jesus, this life following the Risen Christ, means to live in the glory of God, knowing of God’s goodness and love. This also is a joyous way of life: the joy of life in Jesus is being free, liberated by the love of God and free to love just as we are freely loved by God, fully and completely loved. And as Jesus concludes, this is a holy way to live: life in Jesus is set apart; not determined by our world, but

freed to bring love into the world, freed to be in service and above all, freed to be the peacemakers and justice seekers our world needs so desperately.

And so for us, for you and me as well, these experiences of our spiritual forebearers is important, because we also live in this time without Jesus physically present in our midst. Just like those spiritual ancestors, we too have a deep need to live in a new way, to find a life in Jesus. And of course, looking forward a bit, we know that next week we will celebrate Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection; the Day of the coming of the Spirit. This is that spirit of truth Jesus brings to us: a spirit to live in faith with one another, to form a community of faith dedicated to the mission of love: loving as Jesus has loved us, living in Jesus by living deeply in that love and freely sharing that love with all. This is the Spirit in which we gather today and which we will celebrate with great joy and solemnity next week. But today we get a foretaste of that Spirit now as we celebrate Mother's Day. I am extremely thankful that the dedicated and faithful women of our community, the women of Good Shepherd, show us day in and day out the power of this Spirit: here on Mother's Day, we give thanks for the nurturing presence of the women in our lives: those who nourish us and love us in the most unconditional and free manner possible. This is a spirit of nurturing love we are blessed to see surrounding us in this community day by day.

And as we prepare to gather around this table, once more to give thanks to God for this mercy, for this spirit of nurturing to graciously bless us, as we prepare, we also find perhaps one of the deepest ways in which our life in Jesus touches our souls: here as we gather around this table, here as we are deep in grateful prayer, here Christ is present with us, a real presence in the deepest spiritual sense. Here we gather to live fully into our life in Jesus. As we share the cup and the bread, we are reminded once more, once more taken to a place where life in Jesus opens up before us. Thanks be to God for this great grace and thanks be to Christ for nourishing us for this life in Jesus, a life we share together. Amen.