



SAINT LUKE'S

EASTER 7
YEAR B

ACTS 1:15-17, 21-26
1 JOHN 5:9-13
JOHN 17:6-19
PSALM 1

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN
MAY 13, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This past Thursday was the Feast of the Ascension, when we celebrate Christ's return to his Father's glory, ascending his throne as Christ the King. It is a glorious Feast because many things come full circle. Jesus' incarnation is when he became human like us so that we might become more like God. And in his life, death, and resurrection, he never stopped being human. The same is true with his ascension. In his ascension, Jesus took with him our humanity and raised it to God's presence and glory. Not only is Jesus Christ enthroned at the Ascension, but also all of humanity is enthroned with him. This is why the 'Good News' isn't just good news for Jesus; it's Good News for all of us!

The Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension come full circle on our Icon Processional Cross. On one side Jesus is enthroned in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, his mother. On the other side, all humanity is enthroned in him as he reigns in majesty, though ever crucified. Our Processional Cross was given in memory of The Rev'd Gene White and was written by The Rev'd John Walsted. It was first used on the Sunday after the Ascension, which is why it returns to us again today.

In Ascensiontide, we now we find ourselves in this liminal space in the liturgical year. We are now in the time between Jesus' ascension into God's glory and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. We are waiting, as Jesus says, to be "clothed with power from on high." We have begun our Vigil of Pentecost, watching and waiting for the Holy Spirit promised to us.

Today's Gospel lesson from John 17 hearkens back to just before Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Jesus knew that there would be a time when his followers would no longer have him. Jesus knew that he would be killed for the way he lived, the way he loved, and because of what he preached. He knew that his followers would be without him one day. And so in our Gospel lesson today, we hear Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. He is laying out his concerns in prayer for his followers and interceding on behalf of all he came to claim as his own. He prays that his followers may continue to share God's love and mercy with a broken and hurting world. He prays for our unity, that we may be one as Jesus and the Father are one. He prays for our protection from evil. He prays that our joy in him may be complete.

Jesus' prayer is a bold word of assurance. This prayer acknowledges the active hand of God in the faith lives of Jesus' disciples and in our ability to believe. Jesus also knows that it is God's mercy, grace, and protection that will sustain us. However, it is not a promise that we will not face hardship and evil. Jesus is praying this precisely because he knows reality of evil and hardship that we will face as his followers. Jesus knows we will face opposition because of his name and the way we live our lives. Moreover, if this prayer promises anything, it promises that we, like Jesus, will be persecuted for our faith, but he also promises that our security is the same security that Jesus had: which is the very love and power of God.¹

In order to sustain those whom he claims as his own, Jesus prays for the sanctification of his followers. He prays for his disciples and he prays for us that we may be united in him and bear witness to the love and power of God. He prays that we grow in holiness and that we live our lives

¹ Year B, Lent and Easter, Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary

accordingly with the ways the Jesus came to teach us. He taught us mercy and forgiveness. He taught us repentance and reconciliation. He taught us truth. Jesus prays, “Sanctify them by your truth. your word is truth.” Jesus, whom we have come to understand as the “Word,” is praying that we be made holy through his very existence. If Jesus is praying for us to be holy, what does living a life of holiness look like today?

In a secular society, particularly in a dog-eat-dog environment like New York City, living a life of holiness is completely countercultural. Difficult as it can be at times, it is still how we as Christians maintain our identity and integrity. When the world demands war, we continue to preach peace. When the world issues a verdict of inequality, we continue to preach and work for the equality of all people. When the world enslaves, we continue to fight for the liberty of the children of God. When the world divides, we unite. When all seems hopeless and lost, we find that one small act of kindness and love can change the world. As Michelle Obama says, “When they go low, we go high.”

“Going high” is what the transforming process of sanctification is all about. Sanctification is about having our hearts, minds, and souls aligned with God’s will and with God’s faithful and loving purposes, shown to us in Jesus Christ. Sanctification is like a tuning fork. It centers and unites us to sing and make music. Sanctification is what brings us into alignment. Sanctification is about lifting up our hearts to God as a living sacrifice.

In January of this year, we had the funeral of dear Georgie Gatch, of blessed memory. Author and historian James Carroll stood in this very pulpit and gave an amazing account of Georgie’s life. Much of what he said was

memorable, but there is one thing I will never forget. He said “Georgie lived with a high heart.” As a Christian, I don’t think there is a higher compliment one could receive. In praying for our sanctification, Jesus is praying for us to have high hearts, lifted to God. Before each Eucharistic Prayer begins, in dialogue we say “Lift up your hearts. We lift them [up un]to the Lord.” That’s why this gathering ~ and this altar are so very important. In the Eucharist, with hearts held high, we find our sanctification renewed in the very Body and Blood of the One who prays that we all might become One in him. May this sacrament nurture us that we may continue to live lives of holiness, walking in God’s ways. May this sacrament continue to tune the instruments of our hearts with God’s loving and purposeful orchestration. And may this sacrament strengthen us give us ‘high hearts’ to sustain us in this world ~ and to God’s praise and glory.

✠ In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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