

This sermon was given by Rev. Joel Krueger on the Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 18, 2014. It is based on the gospel reading for the day, John 14:1-14. It continues the Easter theme of the risen Christ being in and with us and is entitled, "I Am in You and You Are in Me."

The passage that we heard from the gospel of John today is the beginning of what is called Jesus' "Farewell discourse." This is that long, rambling narrative that goes from chapter 14 all the way through chapter 17 and includes a dialogue between Jesus and his closest disciples, but is mostly Jesus talking. Here Jesus seeks to prepare them for his coming death and departure but assures them of his continual presence with them.

Here we also have some of the strongest language given to Jesus regarding his own divinity. When the early church of the second and third centuries sought to institute the high Christology which eventually prevailed in the western church, teaching that Jesus and God were one and the same, that the second person of the Trinity, the Son, was not a "created being" but rather of the same substance as the Father, these words from John were often quoted.

And so, throughout the centuries, the words of John 14, "*Believe in God, believe also in me*"; "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*"; "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*"; "*I am in the Father and the Father is in me.*" All these have been used as requisites for faith. That if one did not "believe" these things, then one could not be truly considered a Christian, one did not possess true faith.

But what if the author of John's gospel wasn't really trying to express a systematic theology of belief? Commentator Cynthia A. Jarvis of the Presbyterian Church states, "*John speaks of believing almost exclusively not as something to which one assents inwardly, but as an outward and active commitment of a person, the person being Jesus.*" (*Feasting on the Word, Yr. A, Vol. 2, p. 467*). In John's gospel, unlike the other gospel

accounts or as we see in Paul's writings, "belief" or "faith" is a verb, not a noun. It is not something one possesses or has, it is something one does.

What if the author of John's gospel is not trying to tell us what ideas or concepts are required for us to "believe" but rather is trying to tell us about his experience of spiritual union that he has come to know through the person of Jesus Christ? What if this is really about relationship? Could it be that the author is trying to tell his readers that true faith is not so much about a set of intellectual beliefs, as it is about relationship? One's relationship with Jesus and God, as well as with others?

If we look at these verses again, with that in mind, reading them together as they were meant to be read, and not just as separate verses, taken out of context, it does seem to make sense. When Jesus says, "*Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.*" he doesn't just stop there, but goes on to talk about going to prepare a place for them, that he will "*come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*" He is clearly talking about his relationship with them, of his desire and intent to be with them.

In his answer to Philip's request to show them the Father, Jesus' reply is "*Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?*"

Jesus speaks of his relationship with God, of his oneness with God, with the spiritual indwelling he experiences with the Spirit of God. It is a relationship that is such that we should be able to know the identity of one if we know the identity of the other. If you know me, Jesus is saying, then you know the Father, you know what God is

like.

But that is not the final point. We are not only given the opportunity to see, and to know who God is by seeing and knowing Jesus. Later in chapter 14, in next week's lectionary passage, we hear Jesus say that if you keep my commandments, that is, if you love one another, then, "*you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*" (14:20). This is a revolutionary idea, that we too, can share in this relationship, can be part of this union of Christ and God's Spirit! And ultimately, that the relationship that brings us within the Spirit of God in Christ, is also a relationship that we are to have with one another.

Ultimately, our faith in Christ is manifest in our relationship with all those around us. A *loving* relationship. If we do not have this, we are not in Christ and not in God and do not possess the faith experienced by the author of this gospel, the faith Christ taught.

It seems that the advent of social media that allows people to not only know about, but to participate in events happening around the globe in present time, has helped to foster some of this sense of relationship. Think of how you felt connected with the parents of the children lost in the wreck of the South Korean ferry; or the families of those in the missing Malaysia Airlines plane; or the loved ones of the nearly 300 miners who lost their lives in Turkey.

Most dramatically, the recent responses to the tragic and traumatic events involving the more than 200 Nigerian girls from Chibok who were kidnapped by the terrorist group Boko Haram, speak of this sense of relationship that we are called to have. It has not only been the mothers and fathers of the girls, but people all over the world who have stood in solidarity with them, holding signs that read "**Bring Back Our Girls**". There is a genuine feeling that these girls are family not only to their own

parents, or even just to their own town, but are part of *our* families as well. They are *our* daughters, *our* sisters, too!

But it is not just about the big events, the tragedies that occur on some far side of the world. This sense of relationship has to begin with the people right around us. If we fail to love, respect, and appreciate the person sitting or standing right next to us, the one we work beside, the one we walk by on the street, go to school with, serve at church with, tuck into bed at night, or choose to make our lives with, then we have no place in Christ, no part in God.

We are called to share a love that brings us close to one another, that makes us each a part of each other. That's what the author of John is trying to tell us and that same idea was expressed very well in a song written by Lorre Wyatt and sung by the late Pete Seeger. It is called "*Somos El Barco*" or "*We Are the Boat.*" I will close with these words and ask that you allow this image of our being in one another, to speak to you and resonate deep within you.

The stream sings it to the river,
The river sings it to the sea.
The sea sings it to the boat,
that carries you and me.

[Chorus]
Somos el barco, somos el mar,
Yo navego en ti, tu navegas en mi.
We are the boat, we are the sea,
I sail in you, you sail in me.

Now the boat we are sailing in
was built by many hands,
And the sea we are sailing on,
it touches many sands.

[Chorus]
So with our hopes we set the sails
and face the winds once more.
And with our hearts we chart the waters
never sailed before.

[Chorus]