

5th Sunday of Easter – John 14:1-14
St Andrew's Episcopal Church - Sedona, AZ

Believing in Love

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me.”

These are the opening words of Jesus' so called Farewell Discourse to his disciples. Their supper has ended and Jesus has already modeled servant leadership by washing their feet. He has just foretold the betrayal and denial of two of his followers. And he has given the New Commandment: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” Jesus knows this message is both empowering and confusing – to receive God's love and to offer love amidst betrayal and denial. But Jesus doesn't try to make sense of it all. There is no logic to mercy. There is no logic to grace. There is no logic to unconditional love.

Instead of trying to describe why or how or whom to love, Jesus lets his disciples wonder about the expansiveness of this simple yet challenging mandate to offer love, to receive love, to be love. Instead of explaining the inexplicable, Jesus models for them again what love looks like even as he is about to be handed over to death on the cross. He begins by offering comforting words; words similar to ones heard when an angel shows up unexpectedly to deliver a message on behalf of God: “Do not be afraid. Do not worry.” Except in this instance Jesus is the Messenger and the Message. He says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me.” Jesus, the Word of God, the presence of God, the love of God - all are part of that wonderful mystery that

is the One and True God.

Jesus says, Believe in me. Trust in me. Follow me. These encouraging words will accompany the disciples through the uncertain times ahead. These words will become actions as the Holy Spirit guides them in spreading the New Commandment to all peoples. These words will become ways of being as generations of disciples participate in manifesting God's Realm - here on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus reassures his followers that he is preparing a dwelling place in his Father's house for each one of them. These comforting words describe not only a future destination, but the abiding presence of God in every moment during our journey through life and death.

But how can this be so, ask Thomas and Philip? None of this makes sense. It would be great if we had proof or a sign, or could see exactly what Jesus was talking about. How will they know the way to follow Jesus once he has gone ahead? How will they be led to do greater works than ones they have witnessed Jesus doing? Jesus tells them, Believe. Believe in God. Believe in me. This is not the first time Jesus has offered encouraging words about believing. He knows that sometimes we have to hear things repeated more than once or twice before the message even begins to sink in. Just a few chapters earlier, we hear how Jesus seeks solitude to reflect on his ministry. We might imagine that he is a bit frustrated or dismayed, because even though he has performed so many miracles in the presence of his disciples, they still did not believe in him. But for

Jesus, it's not about believing in him as an individual. That's not the message. He says, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me." So for Jesus, it's not about glorifying himself, it is about glorifying God in relationship – Jesus in God and God in Jesus. It's about nurturing Jesus in us and us in Jesus. It's about celebrating our relationships with Christ as the Body of Christ. Because when Jesus says believe, it is not a command or demand. It is an invitation to a way of being; a way of living. It is an invitation to follow Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life. It is an invitation to abide with and return to the One who brings new life to all of life.

Abiding with God now and dwelling with God for eternity is the promise that Jesus makes on our behalf through all our moments of belief and disbelief; through all our moments joy and sorrow; through all our moments of hope and despair. Contrary to a self-righteous interpretation that this promise is exclusive to Christians, I believe that Jesus' promise is for all people and all creation. God being Love and each of us being made in the image of Love and given life to share Love, God intends that we return to Love by the Way of Love. The dwelling place that Jesus prepares for us is made by Love, and with Love and for Love. Jesus is always calling us to return to that sacred and unbounded dwelling place where he abides. Jesus is always calling us to believe that love is possible. Love is the Source. Love is the Way. Love is the Destination.

As most of us know, dwelling in Jesus' Love is as challenging for us as it was for his first followers. The invitation to love as a way of being throughout life and death is incredibly counterintuitive for human beings. Try as we might there are always situations that push our buttons or trigger memories of experiences that challenge us to live into the love which God calls us. We only have to remember that in our secular culture, today is Mothers' Day.

One of the problems with Mothers' Day is that it doesn't always look the images we see advertised by florists. It doesn't always match the lovely poetic phrases expressed in Hallmark cards. Mothers' Day can bring up a whole range of emotions. For men and women; for children and adults. Since biblical times, motherhood has been raised up on a pedestal and idealized as the pinnacle of a woman's life. Culturally, barren women were ostracized – at least until they miraculously become pregnant in old age – as if that were a blessing! Sarah was so desperate to have a child that she gave Abraham her servant Hagar to bear him a son. And we all know how complicated that situation became! And then there was the complex relationship between Jacob and Leah and Rachel – all of them living through the challenges of wanting and having children. But probably the woman who is most admired and revered as a mother, is Mary – the mother of God. A mother who by many accounts did not always live into the idealized cultural expectations of motherhood.

It was Mary who could have been dismissed quietly by Joseph for

becoming pregnant out of wedlock. It was Mary who lost track of her son while traveling, only to discover that he was teaching in the temple. It was Mary who prompted her cranky son to turn water into wine for the benefit of their newlywed friends. It was Mary who followed her son's journey thorough ministry only to have him ask, "Who is my mother?" And it was Mary who saw her beloved son unjustly crucified by an angry and jealous mob. It was Mary who believed, through all of these trials and tribulations, that God was with her. God was with her in the love and support expressed by the fatherhood of Joseph. God was with her not only in the presence of Jesus, but in his absence through the Holy Spirit. God was with her not only in the loving presence of her family and the disciples, but in the Divine Love they shared by spreading the Good News to all peoples.

Believing in Love. Believing in God. Believing in living as God's Love. That is the open invitation that Jesus offers us. Despite our worries and our fears of not living up to society's expectations, or the church's expectations, or our parents' expectations, or even our over-achiever self-imposed expectations. It is Love that abides with us and brings us back to love. May we believe in God. Believe in Love. And together be the Love that God desires for all.

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