

Easter VI Year C 2016

Now that you are scholars of Plato... right?... if you were paying attention to my last several sermons... we'll continue our conversation about the gospel of John in light of the Platonic ideal, recognizing that in the first century Platonic thought was the benchmark, the dominant force in the philosophical world... So I'm saying that this gospel makes little sense without some deference to Plato's cosmology ... The gospel of John is articulated within the Platonic ideal...that is, to distill Platonic thought, that the things of earth are representative of things in heaven... that even in a transient world, a world of change and random occurrence; a world of mutability and mortality, of suffering and death... even in this world one can glimpse the eternal, the reality of heaven... the world of truth found in the symbols of our common life.... For Plato the veil between heaven, the eternal... and earth, subject to space and time... the veil is very thin... and at times transparent... That is what the mystical experience is... when one sees the unity, the oneness of the eternal with time and space, the intersection between the eternal and time... when truth enfolds us... when we see the light... as it were.

So to apply the Platonic ideal to this gospel one must recognize that the figure of Jesus, the "Word", John calls him... we must recognize that Jesus represents 'Godness'... that Jesus' life on earth is a view through the proverbial veil of the life of God... This gospel is not so much deifying Jesus into the heavens beyond our comprehension, but bringing the life of God down to earth... in time and space... that God no longer lives in the heavens or on the mountaintops, but among us.

A person at the last Rector's forum proposed that the gospels, including the gospel of John, are attempting to 'express the inexpressible God'... I've thought a lot about that... and I want to say that in John's gospel particularly, these scribes are making the audacious claim that God is indeed expressible... that to know the person of Jesus one is able to know God... that is an audacious claim... The crux, the edge of this gospel is that to live the way of the Jesus movement: living a life of feeding the hungry and healing the sick and dignifying the shamed and including and befriending and forgiving and calling out injustice... and setting wrongs right... Living the way of Jesus is to know Jesus... not as some superhuman wholly apart from us, someone with whom we can't identify... but as one of us... God in the flesh... The archetype of who we are in the eyes of God... so, in the Platonic ideal... Jesus is not only the lens through which we see God... but Jesus is

also the lens through which God sees us... Jesus tells us time and again that he and the Father are one... and the writers of this gospel are adamant that Jesus and the movement that follows him are one as well.

Now, if we own that, if we believe that, then what does that mean for us? Well, for one thing it means we are sent into the world as Godness, sent as Jesus is sent... It means that the love we practice in the world is the means of God's love in the world, and therefore the means of salvation... salvation not something we attain, but something we bear... It means that our true nature is to love as God loves... that we live lives of sacrifice... that we live lives not for ourselves but for our neighbor... that the cause of the good is worth giving our lives for... that our responsibility is to bring heaven on earth... that we are given as friends to the outcasts of our world... and not just the nice and presentable outcasts, but the unlovable outcasts... that we speak up for the voiceless, the powerless, the shamed.

Somehow over the course of the church becoming institutionalized the church got comfortable... but brothers and sisters, this faith of ours calls us out of our comfortable lives into the streets of our world... laying aside our fear of the other, our xenophobic predispositions, our anxiety for risk... We are called into the streets to love as God loves, because we are of God... We are called into the streets to love relentlessly, without filter, unconditionally, unrestrained, heedless of the risk... loving to a fault... because that is the way God loves... and we, friends, are of God.

And in our reading for today we are given another word, another shining symbol of what God is like... Jesus names the Spirit of God, the animating life breath of the world... he names it the Advocate... which in the Greek is the same word as the word for lawyer.... As followers of Jesus, the Godness on earth, we are to live lives of passionate advocacy, standing up for those treated unjustly... giving dignified voice to the ones considered voiceless. It is not enough to just believe... that's easy... We are being called as bearers of God's good news... God's jubilee... to argue passionately the 'case' that all share in the abundance, the good life of God..... This is not just one facet of the Christian faith or my take on it... this is the Christian faith... This life of advocacy to which we are called is not just one corner, an obscure angle of the gospel message... It is the message.... I'm not saying that belief isn't important... But I am saying that it is our practice, our artful and imaginative practice of the good news that shapes and emboldens our belief.... And that to know God, to really know God, is entirely possible when we

love as God loves... When we labor to reconcile the injustice that infects the human community, when we live lives of creative advocacy, we will know the God who made the heavens and the earth.... There is no difference in our so-called personal salvation, and the salvation of the world... None of us are saved until all are saved... until all know the dignity of being loved... until all know the dignity of having a safe place in which to live and move... There is no peace until all are at peace... and brothers and sisters we can pray for peace until the cows come home, but until we practice the art of peace, loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, we are as Paul puts it, a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal.

It comes down to this: We are the Incarnation... we are God's love alive in flesh and blood... flesh and blood that is nurture for the world. We are the second coming of the Christ, the anointed ones, anointed at our baptisms. May the Spirit remind us of this our high call... May the Spirit convict us of our responsibility... and may the Spirit banish our fear of living our lives to their fullest. I am convinced that it is not death that we fear... It is life... but it is life, God's life into which we are called, for which we are made.... Take courage good people and live the life God has given you... Your joy will be lasting, and the world will be all the better for it.