

Easter 5, May 22, 2011
John 14:1-14

In the name of God, who makes us, loves us and keeps us. Amen.

At the time that John's gospel was being written, tensions had escalated between the Jewish followers of Jesus and the members of the Jewish community who considered this a perversion of the Jewish cult. Jewish Christians were expelled from the temple and synagogues. There was probably violence as well as open hostility toward the Jewish Christians, as well as violence against Christians from the Roman Empire because Christians would not collude with their ways of domination and oppression. Christians had good reason to fear for their lives. The violent death of Jesus was a great stumbling block because how could this possibly mean that Jesus was someone in whom God was to be found if he had met such a humiliating end? And why would anyone want to proclaim that God was *with* him and do the kinds of things he did which would likely bring violence and early death upon *themselves* as it did for Stephen?

Jesus assures his friends in these farewell discourses that his death shows his union with God not his estrangement from God. In fact, it will be in his leaving and dying that they will finally see that Jesus is one with God and that this is also where *they* are: one with Jesus; one with God. God's house is not the Temple; God's house is not in heaven; God's house, God's dwelling place, is Christ, through whom every created thing has come to be.

When Jesus promises to take us to himself, so that we will be where he is, I think he is referring to his wholeness, his fullness of life and sight, in God. In other words, Jesus has already taken us to be with him in the completeness of his loving and the fullness of his joy. This is not something that *will* happen. This is something that *already is*.

I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also, in my goodness and healing and life-giving work, in the oneness of God, in the fullness of Spirit. There you also are with me. Everything I have is yours.

When Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life," I think he is referring to something living and dynamic: the I AM WHO AM of the burning bush. Think of it backwards: the way, the truth and the life is *I AM*. I AM is *aliveness*, living, dynamic, mysterious and beyond knowing. You could say, *Aliveness* is the way, *Aliveness* is the truth, *Aliveness* is the life. The way is not a moral code, the truth is not a dogma or a doctrine, the life is not a cure. I AM cannot be codified, defined and known. The way and the truth and the life is living in Christ where one does not know the future, or control the outcome, or love for a reason. It is being alive in a dynamic and ongoing unfolding relationship without end.

I believe that we have dreadfully misunderstood and misused the words "No one comes to God except through me," as if there were an idea of Jesus we must accept in order to be acceptable to God. In fact, we say that all things have come to be in Christ, and grace is everywhere. "No one comes to God except through me," is not conditional: if you believe, then you come. Rather it is a statement of fact. ***It is a declaration of oneness.*** Christ is in all things and all things are in Christ. Everyone comes to God in Christ because all of us **are** in Christ. No doubt Jesus is also saying that his way of death

is the way of God, the loss of self is life itself, and there is no getting around it. John the evangelist is saying that the way of Jesus, even if it leads to death, is the way of the disciple of Jesus.

As long as “no one comes to God except through me” can be understood as referring to a creed, a set of beliefs *about* Jesus, we can know what a Christian is, who belongs, who is in, who is out. We have certainty. We have something that can be grasped and held on to. This may be very appealing in our uncertain and chaotic world where life is changing minute by minute. But I believe it goes against everything that Jesus said and did in his life to be occupied with who is in and who is out. It is this very thinking that killed him in the first place.

When Connecticut Episcopalians were newly distressed with the issue of Gene Robinson’s ordination to the episcopate one of my clergy colleagues stood up at a clergy gathering and told us he that he was gay and had been with his partner for 14 years. He needed to hire an assistant. In fear and trepidation he called a newly ordained woman who was from one of the very conservative parishes in that diocese. He said they disagreed on every theological issue there is. But they continued to talk and discuss. They worked well together and had deep affection and respect for each other. He said something I will never forget: “Never mind looking for common ground, we already stand on holy ground.” From this starting point we will indeed do greater things than Jesus has done. We will see the transformation and rebirth of communities and societies as well as individuals.

Death rips loved ones out of our arms. Death makes reasons and explanations obscene. Death honors neither achievements nor moral codes. The way and the truth and the life which is I AM, is loving without condition, seeing without separation and living without time. And all the power of death cannot undo or destroy it.

Beth L. Long
St. Gregory the Great, Athens