

Easter 5C, May 4, 2010

Lections: Acts 11:1-18; Ps. 148; Rev. 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

You have probably noticed some changes in the lectionary since Easter – no reading from the Hebrew scriptures, always beginning with a lesson from Acts about the early church, visions from Revelation over the past few weeks, and, although we are in year C (the gospel of Luke, mostly) we are reading lots from the gospel of John right now. John has a particular focus on a cosmic Christ and we hear about a community of love.

Today we meet right off with a controversy in the life of the early church. In the first century the dividing line is between ‘exclusionary holiness and holy hospitality.’ Then the controversy centered on circumcision, dietary laws and ritual observances. Today the challenge is about all the sacraments for all the baptized (marriage for gay folks), women in the episcopate (England), bias against Aboriginal folks here and immigrants in Arizona (although Gordon Brown was caught in a pickle on this one too). Jon Walton in his recent article in *Christian Century* says the Spirit of Love “cannot resist drawing disparate elements together.” God always seems to ask us about a broader view.

Peter has that spirit and bumps up against those who favoured exclusionary holiness. They were unhappy about his table fellowship which seems to be a continuation of the scandalous practice of Jesus, a holy hospitality for a house of all sorts. Peter, when telling about his dream which inspired new actions, seems to know almost immediately that the dream was not about what was to be on the dinner plate; his faith told him the inclusion was about people. Knowing that arguments would not change the hearts of his listeners he told them a story which included signs of God’s Spirit which they recognized in themselves.

This does require a bit of willingness, however, discerning what God might be doing in love and change. Melissa and I borrowed two children yesterday (they came accompanied by their parents) to go with us to see the 3D IMAX film “How to train your dragon.” I’m always interested in the cultural messages in contemporary film and drama. I’m looking critically at the core values and how they are represented; is humanity flawed? Capable of transformation? How is the Good portrayed? In this film a Viking village populated by people with Scots accents and repeated post disaster rebuilds, continues a pattern handed on to each generation without rethinking or gaining new information. They fight and kill dragons as they have always done; there is a strong incentive to belong to family and social group by continuing this norm. One young man, staying true to his own nature, reaches across species to care for a wounded animal, thus gaining a new frame of reference. Eventually as he tells his story a transformation of the known world seems like a dream. (The film is made by Dreamworks) Violence ends and peace prevails, much like the dream we are given in the text from Revelations where every tear is wiped away. Hope is on the horizon.

The gospel lesson is a bit of a dream too, that love will be the only goal. Jesus told lots of simple stories inviting all sorts of people across dividing lines. His parables allowed for a variety of ways to explore questions, to learn about God’s perspective: abundance rather than scarcity, community rather than

isolation, transformation rather than homeostasis. People on a faith journey are invited into a process of change, of love that transforms.

Philosopher and theologian Jonathan Sacks has written a powerful new book, [The Dignity of Difference](#), as a plea for tolerance in an age of extremism. “Nothing has proved harder in the history of civilization than to see God, or good, or human dignity in those whose language is not mine, whose skin is a different color, whose faith is not my faith, and whose truth is not my truth...There are surely many ways to arrive at a generosity of spirit; each faith must find its own...such a faith would say that I am a sentence in a story, the story of my people, but that there are other stories, each written in the letters of lives bound together, each part of the story of stories that is the narrative of humanity’s search for God and God’s call to all people...we know all people have some share of wisdom and we should be willing to learn from them, for none of us knows all the truth and each of us knows some of it.” Jonathan Sacks is the chief rabbi of the United Kingdom.

In this parish we recognize and strive to appreciate how the Spirit of Love moves in the different life stories represented here. Gay folks and aboriginal people need for us to hear the stories which tell the truth of exclusion. Children and elders have fears and struggles around dependence and independence. Those who are comforted by tradition are in relationship with those who seek fresh expressions of faith.

From May 30 through the month of June we will be invited into teaching circles led by native elders; on May 23 we will baptize at a Pentecost ceremony that includes African drumming. We will soon also welcome a Muslim scholar. Am I dreaming or is God spreading a new spread sheet here??

Amen+

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