Fifth Sunday of Easter All Saints’ Church

May 19, 2019 Year C

Acts 11:1-18 Revelation to John 21:1-6

Psalm 148 John 13:31-35

Let us praise the name of the Lord!

Often when we think of glory or the glory of God, or something glorified, we think of beauty, perfection, something exquisite, beyond this world…. expressed in excellence, splendor, and magnificence. Usually we are filled with wonder and awe… such glory is heavenly, and not of this world.

Yet, Jesus has another idea. Glory for Jesus includes all of life. Indeed, in all of its beauty; ***yet also*** glory can be found within betrayal, weakness, sin, confusion, fear and death. The whole kit and caboodle. The Alpha and the Omega and everything in-between

Judas has just left the dinner party, departing on his mission to betray. And it’s at that point that Jesus says, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified.” What? Right after this act of betrayal? This makes no sense. How can betrayal be connected to glory? Like Judas, Peter, too, will betray Jesus through his denial. And all of the other disciples will depart and hide and abandon the man they love so dearly.

Glory? Far from it. And yet, Jesus is making a point. It’s ***all of life*** that has the potential gift of glory; in all of its messiness, brokenness and upheaval, God acts.

As I shared with you earlier, Robyn Baker died this week, suddenly. As soon as I learned, I called Jonathon, her husband, to share in his grief, if I could, and he told me, “I’m holding Nakitta’s hand right now (Robyn’s daughter); and she is within the hour of giving birth; keep us in your prayers.” What a powerful moment, to be both holding someone in grief and joy, within life and death, within a “passing.” With one loved one passing to God, and another one passing from God. Glory.

“Little Children, I am with you only a little longer.” Jesus is addressing his disciples tenderly and lovingly because he knows that they are going to be terrified, lost and confused.

And what will save them (us)? “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.” It’s that simple, and that difficult. An invitation to be Love.

It’s not that love is new. It’s all about ***the source from where that love comes***. Jesus is teaching with words and with his life, that love comes not from power and might, but from the willingness to be in the moment, to surrender to what is in front of us, to embrace humility and grace, to risk loving the stranger, even the enemy. To lay down your life for your friends.

In other words, it’s as if Jesus is calling you to come and jump into the hidden harmony of life with open arms, with a readiness to receive, to experience, to behold, knowing always that the experience is never ***only*** of your own making. Our task is to recognize the potential glory of God shining through all that we do. Often to experience this glory, we have to cross away from our comfort zone.

I think that’s one of the reasons I like to travel so much. When you are taken out of your comfort zone, you see in new ways. When you cross boundaries into new territories, and you can’t rely on what you’ve always done before. The safe limits of “proceed as normal” no longer exist. You’re in a new land, and maybe more dependent on your fellow sojourners than you want to be.

This week, I saw the recent release of *The Best of Enemies*, a movie featuring Ann Atwater, a civil rights activist in Durham, North Carolina, and C.P. Ellis the leader (the Exalted Cyclops) of the Ku Klux Klan. They had been fighting for a decade, until in 1971, the two agreed with a lot of resistance to be co-chairs of a two-week community meeting dealing with a court-ordered school desegregation decree.

Based in their true story, we are shown that they agreed to be co-chairs in order to represent their constituency, and to be in a better position to fight and to protect their interests. And yet what they do is cross into each other’s lives. Their known boundaries were about to be obliterated.

In that crossing over, something is released. There’s a poignant scene in the movie, which is true to their lives. The black pastor of the town asks Bill Riddick, the organizer of this 2-week event, if they could close each day with gospel singing to ease the tensions of the days’ conversations, and as a way to hold onto hope. C.P. Ellis rejects the request unless he is given permission to bring his Ku Klux Klan leaflets into the town meeting and display them.

Bill Riddick agrees with C.P. Lewis’ request, leaving Ann Atwater spitting fire. Yet the gospel singing begins to close each day and the Ku Klux Klan displays are up.

And then there comes this moment, when Ann saw young people of her neighborhood tearing down his displays, she stopped them, even to the point of putting back the Ku Klux Klan hood on the model.

She was terrified in the act of slipping the hood over the model, and C.P. Ellis sees her terror and in the intimacy of this moment, (should we call it grace? The glory of God?), he begins to feel her pain, and maybe for the first time begins to empathize with her plight.

And they begin to talk, and Ann Atwater suggests that they have more in common than not, because they are both poor. Together maybe they could find dignity and give something to their children that would break the cycle of violence and poverty and powerlessness.

I won’t tell you the end of the movie, but I recommend the story; one that I knew nothing about before, but as Bill Riddick, who is still alive today, says in an interview, “I was never expecting a miracle.” When C.P. Ellis died, Ann Atwater gave the eulogy.

Jesus is so good about inviting us into our fear, into the group’s fear, and asking us to give over our anxiety, vulnerability, and our need for control, to experience the common good. To trust in a goodness, the spark of the divine within, buried within all of us. Something we all have the potential to share, with God’s help.

Sometimes you have to walk not by sight, but by faith. Jesus is inviting us to love as he loved. And where is Jesus as he is loving? Jesus is always with the sinner, the broken, the dispossessed, the hungry, the fearful, the betrayers, and the lost. And in all of that brokenness, Jesus believes that the Glory of God will be lifted up.

Last week at the Spring Renewal held by the diocese, someone asked, “Can we be clear about the difference between the Rotary Club and Church? The members of the Rotary Club start in prayer, they name their values, they create community, the try to make a difference in their neighborhood and in the world. How is the Church different? Are we the Rotary Club at prayer?”

I think we are at the crux of what makes Church, church. What is the source of our love? It comes from humility and being with the dispossessed as our starting point… not power.

Jesus wants us to love as he loved us, even as he forgives his tormentors from the cross. Sometimes, I think it’s almost a plea from Jesus. “Please, give it a try.”

This love is not about a feeling; it’s about jumping into the hidden harmony of the universe and trusting that God is with us, or as Ann Atwater says, “God will have your back.”

It’s about letting go; it’s about our presence, our time, our dignity, our listening, our seeing, our lending a hand, our honoring of pain, our forgiveness, our walking together no matter what. And often we have to cross boundaries to find this love.

In it all, even in the failures, and the deaths, and the losses, we will find not only our own dignity and gifts, but also experience the glory of God. Why? Because in this stance of standing with Jesus, we find the resurrection, the way of resurrecting into the fullness of our lives. AMEN