Sixth Sunday of Easter All Saints’ Church

May 6, 2018 Year B

Acts 10:44-48 1 John 5:1-6

Psalm98 John 15:9-17

We thank you Jesus for all the ways you easter in us. Amen

“Jesus said to his disciples, ‘As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.’”

I love the way John uses the word ***abide*** in his gospel. The word is everywhere. And it has so many meanings. It can mean ***dwell***- to live, to be, to make a home, to have a roof over your head. It can also mean to ***sojourn***, to travel, to be on a pilgrimage, to be carried, to explore. And it can mean to ***wait***, to be aware of the present, to lean on the Now, to let go.

In many ways this one line is a template for the Christian life of faith. We abide in Jesus’ love by dwelling in it, by being carried through it, and by waiting for it, ever mindful of our dependence on Jesus’ presence in our lives in all the ways we ***dwell, sojourn and wait.*** Abiding…. It’s how Jesus makes a home in our heart.

Jesus’ relationship with us is based in intimacy, not darkness, and never fear. His deep abiding friendship is freely given, never earned. There’s nothing tit-for-tat about it, not transactional or product driven.

Jesus loves us fully, through grace, forgiveness, gratitude and hope. There’s always a new day with Jesus, a new start, and he wakes up with us every morning with delight for our lives and for his love for us.

As many of you know, I was on a silent retreat last week with the brothers of Society of St. John the Evangelist. They have a monastery in Cambridge, but also one in Newbury, MA, on 200 acres of land that abuts Merrimack River to the West and Artichoke River to the East, with trails upon trails for walking and praying…… in woods, above cliffs, and along rivers.

That’s where I went. Emory House.

I signed up for the retreat months ago, and it’s a good thing as it fills up right away. It’s a retreat for priests, which the brothers hold two times a year, and ten of us showed up, coming from all parts of the country: St. Louis, Minnesota, Vermont, Washington DC, New York, California, and me from New Hampshire! Some have waited for years before they could find the time to “get in.” You have to act quickly.

Ten of us from all different walks of “priesthood life” showed up on the monks’ doorstep. And they said, “Come, you who are weary and heavy laden, we are here to take care of you, to give you rest; you are servants of the church and we want to attend to your every need; we want you to rest, to eat well, to unplug, to center, all within a companionship of silence and solitude. We are here praying for you. That’s our purpose for this week. To make a home for you.

Each day was marked with four services- morning prayer, evening prayer and compline with a 12 noon Eucharist. Our meals were taken in silence. We had a few teaching sessions given by Brother Curtis and Brother Geoffrey, but even in those, we didn’t talk much.

It’s really interesting to have your silence broken- not by conversations, but by the words in prayers, or by the psalms chanted and within homilies. Though I loved the silence, I could tell I was longing for words too. Even before I heard the spoken word, I was leaning in, in anticipation…. To make a home for the words I was receiving.

One homily in particular has stuck with me. I have been thinking about it for days. Brother Nicholas, when he was a young man, in his early thirties, was called by his father with bad news. He had 4th stage cancer, with a bad prognosis. Nicholas, who was living in Colorado at the time, was able to take a six-month leave of absence, and so left his home to take care of his father.

An invaluable time. One night, they were watching the Bruins. He said he wished he had spent more time watching the Bruins with his dad. He wasn’t a hockey fan, but his dad was. Out of the blue, during the game, his father reached over and without a word, put his hand on Nicholas’ hand and just held it. Not a demonstrative father, this meant the world to Nicholas.

When six months were up, Nicholas had to return to Colorado, and a few weeks later, a little sooner than he thought, but not unexpectedly, he got the call that his father had died. Overwhelmed, sad, and in mourning, (one of those times in life when we dwell, sojourn, and wait all at the same time), a prayer kept coming to his heart: I want my dad to hold my hand again. “What a stupid prayer; I know that can’t happen; I know he’s dead; why am I praying for something that is impossible?”

It makes you think about prayer. I think praying is sometimes like falling in love. You can’t help who you fall in love with and some prayers just rise up beyond our capacity to control them. I also think “impossible” prayers help us to claim our lives, our needs, our dependence on God, and our need to surrender our lives to God. Your will, dear Lord, not mine, be done.

Prayers, even impossible ones, help us to name what we are struggling with, like markers or frames for our lives, giving us a way to see in, and to reflect. They can help us be transparent as well. They give us ways of knowing ourselves. And how we are making our home with Jesus.

The next day, after his father’s death, was a Sunday, and Nicholas went to church. During the service, there was an elderly man a few pews ahead of him, having trouble breathing. It was progressively getting worse, and Nicholas on his way back from communion, sided up next to him to see if he could give him some help. The man was very thankful and as others began to loosen his tie, put a shawl around him, call 911, get him a glass of water, he and Nicholas locked eyes. The stranger held his gaze for a long time, and then he reached out and cupped his hand over Nicholas’, just as his own father had done.

And Nicholas said to us, “As sure as I was then, I am now, and can still feel it as if it were yesterday though it was ten years ago, I knew my father was holding my hand. “My prayer had been answered. My impossible prayer had been answered.”

Nicholas was not sharing that story to tell, us, “See you just have to pray harder, and God will answer your prayers.”

No, Nicholas was giving us a story about grace, about presence, about abiding, about dwelling, sojourning, and waiting. When we pray, we have the opportunity to pour ourselves out to God, as we would to a dear friend. None of it has to make sense, but naming our needs, our hopes, and our desires is a way of loving God and each other. And in this love, our prayers give us the opportunity to have a better sense of when our prayers are answered, maybe not in the way we had hoped, but with an assurance that we have received a gift.

I think that’s what Jesus means when he says that he tells us these things, so that his joy may be in us, so that our joy may be complete.

You see, the day after Nicholas’ father had died, and he was in great pain of sorrow and grief, nevertheless, he was filled with joy. A joy you cannot explain, but you know, because it fills you up. Fills you up in all the ways Jesus abides in us and we in him as we ***dwell, sojourn and wait***. As we abide. As we make our home in Jesus and he makes his home in us. Amen.