

Reflection

May 22, 2020

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As we have been sheltering in place, I became aware of three threads in today's readings that are woven throughout this time. The threads that surfaced are tenderness, grief and joy, appearing in almost all of the readings of these weeks – the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus; the Emmaus walk; Mary Magdalene's encounter with the Risen One; the stoning of Steven; the breakfast at the lake; the persecutions of the apostles, the death of Judas, the forgiveness of Peter; the disciples' ministry of preaching, baptizing and working miracles.

The first thread is the tenderness of Jesus. Chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel bear the title "Discourse at the Last Supper." In spite of what lies ahead of him, Jesus' heart is turned toward his friends. His love is reaching out to prepare them for what is coming:

"In a short time, you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again..."

"I am going away and shall return ..."

"I will not leave you orphans ..."

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I shall ask my Abba and you will be given another advocate to be with you forever ..."

"I have told you this now, before it happens, so that when it does happen, you may believe ..."

"I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

Jesus continues warning them about being hated because they do not belong to the world. Reminding them that a servant is not greater than the master and if he was persecuted, so they will be also. And even more, that he will no longer call them servants but friends because he has made known to them everything he has learned from his Abba.

The second thread is grief. Ascending into heaven, Jesus is no longer visible to the disciples. He charged them to remain in the city until they have been clothed from on high. Here, they, and we, are again in this strange place called grief. Grieving is a laborious process – experiencing the reality of the loss, confronting and accepting it, and finally to an altered consciousness, living with the reality created by the loss.

The words of Jan Richardson in her poem on the Ascension, offer us a way through.

I know how your mind
rushes ahead
trying to fathom
what could follow this.
What will you do,
where will you go
how will you live?

You will want
to outrun your grief.
You will want

to keep turning toward
the horizon
watching for what was lost
to come back
to return to you
and never leave you again.

For now
hear me when I say
all you need to do
is still yourself,
is to turn towards one another,
is to stay.
Wait
and see what comes
to fill the gaping hole
in your chest.
Wait with your hands open
to receive what could never come
except to what is empty
and hollow.

.....
Wait for it.
Still yourself.
Stay.

“Circles of Grace,” Jan Richardson

And then the ALLELUAs come tumbling down all over the place, Joy, the third thread. How does one capture Joy? In her *Book of Qualities*, J. Ruth Gendler offers this description of Joy.

“She is in love with life, all of it, the sun and the rain and the rainbow. She climbs mountains, sings in the hills. Joy drinks pure water. She sits with the dying and attends many births. Although Joy is spontaneous, she is immensely patient. She does not need to rush. She knows that there are obstacles on every path and that every moment is the perfect moment. At times, Joy is elusive, seeming to disappear even as we approach her. The distance is enormous and we wonder if the effort to reach her is worth it. Yet she waits for us. Her desire to walk with us is as great as our longing to accompany her.”

J. Ruth Gendler, *The Book of Qualities*

As we look at how these three qualities are woven into these days, we discover that if we hone our awareness, living in the present moment, we might discover that tenderness, grief and joy are always hanging around in each of our ordinary days.