



That Where I am, There You May Be Also

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn given for the people of St. John's Episcopal Church
The Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2020: John 14:1-14*

In the name of the Triune God, who calls each one of us Beloved. **Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

[The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!]

It's still Eastertide so we get to keep saying that. And today, it's also Mother's Day – so, happy Mother's Day to all of you! I say this sincerely, regardless of whether you are a mother or need a mother, want to be a mother or never dreamed of it. Motherhood is the most original and primal connection any of us has, even when it is deeply flawed, simply through the force of biology and what it is to grow from a fertilized egg into a newborn baby inside a mother's womb, and then to be nurtured, however imperfectly, by our moms or other caregivers. Some of you as mothers are working fulltime while trying to also provide daycare, school, and running a household simultaneously, and you're coping with it as best you can, even if that means calling 10:00am wine:thirty every day. Some of you are grandmothers who ache to see your grandkids and can't. Some of you have never had children and it is a yearly source of pain to have to be around others celebrating mother's day, so the fact that Minnesota's fish opener is also mother's day is good news to you. And some of you have lost mothers this year, and I know that the loss is profound. Regardless, Mother's Day brings up that most primal and primordial of connections, the raw fabric of what it means to be human, which is that we are relational and interdependent and meant to connect with one another.

Social researcher and author Brene Brown has said that if social scientists have learned anything, it is that the “why” of human existence is for connection. And that is why we are all going a little stir crazy right now. We yearn to connect, but we’re just not overly good at doing that without being in physical proximity to each other. Sometimes even when we are in physical proximity to each other we’re not good at it. This week I sent an email to all of you that shared with you our current best tentative plans for a phased re-opening of the building, based on guidance we got from our Bishop and the usual medical experts. If you’re anything like me, you’re still reeling because it’s finally dawning on us that this pandemic might be less like a blizzard, and more like a winter. Or even a mini ice age. How are we going to continue to be St. John’s if we can’t gather in large numbers for a long time? If we can’t celebrate Holy Communion together for a long time? Holy Communion, for us, might as well be called Holy Connection, for the depth of what it means to us.

Jesus, in today’s reading from John’s gospel, says this:

Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

Every week, when we celebrated Holy Communion, I would say this to you as I invited you to the table:

The table of bread and wine is now made ready. It is the table of company with Jesus and all those who love him. So come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more. You who have been to the sacrament often and you who have not been in

a long time or ever. You who have tried to follow Jesus and you who have failed: Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

Embedded in the heart of our scripture and tradition and relationship with God is this invitation to be with Jesus where he is even when that seems utterly impossible. For some of you, that may make no sense. Some of you feel more connected with God as Creator or God as the Spirit than with God as Jesus or the Christ. But stay with me. You know, even if you can't articulate it in words, what it has meant to receive the bread and the wine of Christ's table, week after week, year after year. It symbolizes our primal connection with the God who nourishes us and meets us as we actually are, instead of how we think we should be, in the person of Jesus. It speaks to us of the unconditional love of God who will go to any lengths to be in solidarity with us, to experience the joy and pain of life as one of us, to suffer and die with us.

My friends. At the heart of the Way of Jesus, the heart of the Way of Love, is Jesus' death and resurrection. Just before he was killed he spoke these words to his disciples, long before there was a Holy Communion established. He said that he would prepare a place for us, so that where he is, there we might be also. I don't think that meant heaven only, or the utopian eschaton in which Christ comes again at the end of time. As we watch the disciples learn to connect with Jesus in the days and weeks after his resurrection, and after Pentecost when the church was in diaspora and they also could not gather in large numbers and did not have the physical presence of Jesus, we see that the church has always not only survived but thrived when this happens. Do you know why?

I think it's because when we strip away all the trappings, we see what Jesus truly offers us. He offers us a connection that transcends any and all barriers. He offers us the connection of reconciliation and union with God. This includes forgiveness and healing, and it includes overcoming injustice,

and it includes experiencing the love of God in face of any and all circumstances. We say that God is love. Well, what really is love? Love is the healing bond of connection that is stronger than any other force on earth. It is the bond that is stronger even than the love a mother has for her child. This bond can survive physical distance. It will do anything to accomplish connection and nurture for all people. God's love is our way of life, it is the why of our existence, and it is deep and strong and abiding.

Our institutions might change, it is true. Our rituals and traditions might have to adapt, that is true. But this same Jesus, who invites us to meet him at Holy Communion each week, is still inviting you to meet him in each other, whether it's over zoom or phone or letter. This same Jesus, is still preparing a place for us so that where he is, there we may be also. The triune God, who calls each of us Beloved, is still inviting us to be a community of belonging for all people, a place that transcends physical space and time.

I want to invite you to take serious inventory of yourself this week. Have you given yourselves permission to mourn that which can't be right now? To be mad and really heartbroken and really lonely? To be frustrated and have mood swings and binge watch Netflix?

Do whatever you need to do to be honest with yourself about how things really are. But don't stop there. This week, I'd like to invite you to take a risk to do three things.

- (1) Be intentional about connecting deeply with God.
- (2) Be intentional about connecting deeply with folks at St John's in a way you haven't yet.
- (3) Be intentional about connecting with at least one person in your family or work or neighbors who is struggling, and just empathize with them without trying to fix anything. Then listen carefully to

what Jesus is asking you to do, whether it's to maintain that connection with them, or get them a bag of groceries, or change your own heart.

Whatever that looks like for you, please do this, and I will too. If you don't know how to connect with God, just try using the Book of Common Prayer, or going on a walk and directing what's in your head toward God or journal or read the Psalms. If you aren't sure how to connect at St. John's, here is my cell phone: 651-246-8547. Please call me and I'll help. Or just answer the phone or your email when your Care Circle leader reaches out to you this week, and be honest with him or her about where you're at and ask them to help you connect. Within you is all the power and creativity of the God in whose image you were made. Use it.

In all these ways, you will be experiencing the Jesus who is still preparing a place for us through our actions. Christ invites us to meet him in each other, and we can remain profoundly connected, and even deepen our connection in powerful ways, because we have a Power greater than ourselves who is present and active. Christ is risen, alleluia!

Questions for discussion:

- (1) How do you react to the idea that the “why” of human existence is for connection, as social scientist Brene Brown said?
- (2) How have you most connected with God during this pandemic? OR what has been the biggest obstacle for you in connecting with God?
- (3) How have you most connected with St. John's during this pandemic OR what has been the biggest obstacle for you in connecting with St. John's?
- (4) How have you best connected with someone outside St. John's who is struggling? OR What has made this most difficult?