

Sermon for 9 May 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Sixth Sunday of Easter/Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day

Scriptures: Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98(UM818, *Response 2*), 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

"Together"

Let's review our purpose as a teaching fellowship during these Great Fifty Days between Easter and Pentecost, two of the great statement-making Sundays of the Christian Year.

We are using the biblical stories, songs, phrases, poems, in the experience of Jesus of Nazareth and his friends. Sometimes we close our eyes and dream as the words are spoken. Sometimes we demonstrate their point with acts taken together. Sometimes we allow a person we've provided with training, income, and health insurance to give his or her reflections for us all for our moment in history. We call it all the people's work, or "liturgy," and pray God's help in doing it. These Sundays, our theme is resurrection, as in Easter.

Today's first scripture stresses the point that Gentiles ... people not born or bred Jewish ... can be full-blown members of the Christian tradition. Peter preaches to the Roman officer, or centurion, and the Holy Spirit comes to him and his household, just as it has come to Peter and the other followers and disciples of the Jew, Jesus. That's one basic lesson of Easter, for Christians. We know we've been resurrected when the Holy Spirit comes to us.

Then we read a psalm backing that up, since you can always find a psalm to confirm a truth in Israel, and Christians follow the teachings of Jesus' people, the Jews. "O sing to the Lord a new song." This Lord is for everybody: "He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity." This is fundamental to Easter: Right will prevail, just as Israel has taught from the start. Resurrection means justice. ... maybe slowly ... but in Jesus, it comes, just as in Israel, where they say, "Next year, in Jerusalem," so often.

Next, a letter from the early church is held up as guidance, reflecting Jesus' insistence on love as the central point of creation and the essence of everything. John's three letters stress this, as we've been reading for several Sundays. "...those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also." Straight Jesus talk. Love God, and your neighbor as much as yourself. That's resurrection living.

Finally, the Gospel lesson has Jesus making it clear that it is all one circle.: "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit..." "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit..." Jesus; God; the Holy Spirit. It's all one system.

And so we come to Mother's Day. We're all supposed to get along. Work well together. That's the sum of Easter, and that's the aim of God in Jesus, and Jesus doesn't do it alone, but calls people to come along in his company and let God's work of the Holy Spirit spread through them.

What Mother's Day means for us is different from what it started out to be in the early 1900's when a woman convinced lots of church people to honor mothers, as she honored hers. Think of it: Women couldn't preach in churches then. They weren't pastors and bishops. They couldn't even vote, either in church or in politics. As far as we've come since then, we're still dealing with a double standard about pay and housework and child-rearing. And so forth.

So, as we honor mothers today, some more basic truths need to be lifted up in the fellowship of believers. I won't go over them except to get you started thinking. One that came to me is the idea of "Mother Earth," or "Mother Nature." Aren't we facing the call of God, not just in Christianity, but in all the great religions, to honor nature better than we have recently? Aren't the processes of nature kind of mothering? More than just surviving? Expanding, not just conquering, although there's plenty of that? What do you think?

Then in terms of tradition: I've heard that anthropologists say the oldest societies weren't male-dominated, but female. You can do your own research: but isn't it possible we might honor the nurturing, cooperating traits of females more than we've been doing the last couple of thousand years? The last twenty years? The last two years?

Finally, how about this idea of equality in our prayer. Somewhere recently I read that it takes more than one to love. You not only love yourself; you love someone else, to fulfill the experience of loving. And now hear this: You really need a third being to get going in loving to the full. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The trinity is like two parents with a child... the loving expands and becomes more than with two, or one.

Think about it. I'm not preaching marriage, or even mating or partnering. But seriously, can't we honor mothers in this progressive age of ours by pushing cooperation? I liked Joe Biden's saying last week, "We need two strong parties."

Together.

I believe that's a sermon.

Let us pray:

Lord, on this day, please teach us some new things about living together. Help us as your offspring to learn cooperation, sharing of power and food and learning and medical care ... like we see those who know you demonstrate... a lot like mothers.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.