

In the Gospel this morning Jesus is speaking with the disciples at the time just before his crucifixion. They had shared a meal; Jesus called them friends, washed their feet, and spoke to his disciples about his leaving them. Jesus was now offering them comfort and a promise of a continuing relationship with God. John 13-17 is called the Final Discourse and focuses on this relationship with God. In the Gospel of John, after Jesus has told his followers not to be troubled, not to be anxious, Jesus invites them--and us--to abide in his love. It is their relationship with him and Jesus' relationship with God that will show them (and us) the way to serve one another—and to love. Yes, it is about serving, yes it is about healing, yes, it is about feeding the hungry and thirsty, but now Jesus promises they will not do it alone and there are no conditions—we are invited to abide in his love. Why is this important? It is important because we need to be reminded at times of loss and anxiety that the love we can't remember is already here--. In John 15:16 Jesus promises another "Paraclete" or Advocate, one who comes along side or walks with, the Comforter, an Advocate for us. We will not be "orphaned" or left alone. "Because I live, you also will live." (John 14:18) The Easter message is with us.

I am intentionally interchanging the disciples and us here—closed in our homes, locked in places we might have thought we had escaped, lonely, anxious and even fearful about many things. While we look forward to Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit, the author of John is reminding us that intimacy with God is already here--we only have to know or follow the one who goes before us. "I am in my Father and you in me and I in you."

All this is religious language; perhaps what we need to think about is Paul, who is speaking to the Greeks in Acts. He did not turn to Jewish stories of faith in this passage, but paid attention to their culture, stories and religious symbols. How do we speak of love? Can we speak the truth to each other and set our hearts free? Can our experience of serving others set our own hearts on fire with compassion because we discover the different ways we love and are loved? Can our friendships during this time of pandemic, which will be remembered 100 years from now, bring us closer to God and to each other because we re-remember what is important in our personal stories of love, truth and compassion? Can our love stories with the One who loves us, and our love stories about the people, creatures and world we love, in the past, in the present, and even into the future, be shared in our own words?

Are we ready to enter more deeply into a relationship of Love, knowing we are loved? Can we find truth in ourselves because we are loved? In Christ we have been called friends; how do we express that love? In Christ, our friends, our sisters and brothers, our children and our parents, (John 19:26) need to know more of our own love stories... There is an old Hymn; "In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no South or North..."

Can we "reach out and touch someone"? "I have fallen and I can't get up..." "Don't be afraid..." "I am with you..."

Pastor Susan

Journey to the Center

Richard Rohr

Both God's truest identity and our own True Self are Love. So why isn't it obvious? How do we find what is supposedly already there? Why should we need to awaken our deepest and most profound selves? And how do we do it? By praying and meditating? By more silence, solitude, and sacraments? Yes to all of the above, but the most important way is to *live and fully accept our present reality*. This solution sounds so simple and innocuous that most of us fabricate all kinds of religious trappings to avoid taking up our own inglorious, mundane, and ever-present cross of the present moment.

As James Finley says, "The greatest teacher of God's presence in our life *is* our life." For some reason, it is easier to attend church services than quite simply to reverence *the real*—the "practice of the presence of God," as some of our saints have called it. Making this commitment doesn't demand a lot of dogmatic wrangling or managerial support, just vigilance, desire, and willingness to begin

again and again. Living and accepting our reality will not feel very spiritual. It will feel like we are on the edges rather than dealing with the essence. Thus most run toward more esoteric and dramatic postures instead of *bearing the mystery of God's suffering and God's joy inside themselves*. But the edges of our lives—fully experienced suffered, and enjoyed—lead us back to the center and the essence, which is Love.

We do not find our own center; it finds us. Our own mind will not be able to figure it out. We collapse back into the Truth only when we are spiritually naked and free—which is probably not very often. *We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking.* In other words, our journeys around and through our realities, or “circumferences,” lead us to *the core reality*, where we meet both our truest self and our truest God. We do not really know what it means to be human unless we know God. And, in turn, we do not really know God except through our own broken and rejoicing humanity.

In Jesus, God tells us that God is not different from humanity. Thus Jesus' most common and almost exclusive self-name is “The Human One” or “A Son of Humanity.” He uses the term seventy-nine times in the four Gospels. Jesus' reality, his cross, is to say a free “yes” to what his humanity daily asks of him. It seems that we Christians have been worshiping Jesus' journey instead of *doing* his journey. The worshiping feels very religious; the latter just feels human and ordinary. We are not human beings on a journey toward Spirit, we are already spiritual beings on a journey toward becoming fully human, which for some reason seems harder precisely because it is so ordinary.

Gateway to Silence: God's life is living itself in me.

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