

Seventh Sunday of Easter  
Vicar Mike Louia

May 4, 2008  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68:1-10;32-25;  
1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

When my children were younger, one of the challenges that Nancy and I faced was coordinating their delivery and pick-up from school and day care. As a young couple, both working outside of the home, our making sure that all the bases were covered, that we didn't inadvertently leave one of them standing on the sidewalk, alone, looking for a familiar face in the crowd of parents was critical. We had a pretty good plan. I was in charge of the delivery, and she was in charge of retrieval. That way, I could be at home getting dinner ready so that we were then able to rejoin the circus that was our life – filled with all kinds of activities in the evenings.

After what had been a rather long, stressful day at work, and as I was busily preparing supper, the phone rang. It was Nancy. I could hear Ryan's voice chattering in the background as she told me that she had one quick errand to run before coming home ... so they would be a little later than originally planned. I was actually relieved. With this gift of time ... I was able to slow down, just a bit, before she and the kids came in the house ... probably starving ... and wanting their dinner.

I was quite involved with the dinner preparations when the phone rang again. It was Megan's day care director. Then her words hit me ... no one came to pick up Megan. I hurriedly drove to the day care (which was only about 1 mile from the house) and picked up Megan. She seemed OK while we were in the center. But, as we drove off back towards the house, Megan looked up at me. "Daddy, why did you forget about me?" In our lives, as well as the lives of the disciples, a well-planned hand-off is critical. And if we set our minds on the disciples' situation immediately prior to the gospel lesson for today, we can see just how critical that hand-off is.

The 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, a portion of which we hear every seventh Sunday of Easter, contains what is referred to as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. It follows the last portion of Jesus' final discourse with the disciples, and takes place in the upper room the night before Jesus' crucifixion. So just as Jesus finishes telling the disciples that he is going away from them ... to a place that they cannot come ... just as Jesus has promised them the future coming of the Holy Spirit upon them to be their advocate ... just as the disciples' confusion has turned into understanding that Jesus is the Son of God, sent by God, to reveal God to the world ... and even though they will scatter during the events of the coming day, Jesus looks up to God ... and prays.

Talk about a well-timed hand-off. As we listen to Jesus' prayer, we hear him pray for the disciples who will very soon be in the world without the physical presence of Jesus. And in his words, we hear of the hand-off that happened when God sent Jesus into the world ... and the hand-off that will happen when Jesus completes God's work and returns to God the Father.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."

The disciples were God's chosen people, given to Jesus, God incarnate, to learn the truth about the love of God for each one of them. Through Jesus' actions, the disciples were shown how to live in the Kingdom of God. Every sign that Jesus performed pointed ultimately to God and the love that God has for God's people. And the disciples, through the actions of Jesus, finally get it. They understand and, by God's grace believe, that Jesus is the very Son of God, sent by God, to overcome sin and death and redeem the world.

But, for the disciples, the next day, in a way that the world would not understand, Jesus' actions would once again reveal the love that God has for God's people: not through the triumphant actions that would be associated with secular rulers of the day, not through coercion or might, but through the humility of the cross. Even the disciples, the ones who up to this point actually got it – would be scattered, confused, feeling abandoned. "All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them."

But they wouldn't be abandoned for long. For as surely as Christ hung on the cross, died and was buried according to God's plan, he was also raised by God's plan, once again pointing to God the Father and to the love that God has for God's people. And it is through God's actions on the cross, that those who were given by God to Jesus – to teach, to guide, to heal and to love – are then given back to God – to teach, to guide, to heal and to love. But the hand-off doesn't stop there.

For the disciples, and for each one of us, we are then given back to the world – as disciples in the Kingdom of God. We are gathered together ... and at the same time ... sent out into the world as God's messengers. "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." In our being sent, we are not abandoned, left behind, if you will, or thrown out to the world alone. As God and Jesus are one, are connected in an intimate relationship with one another, so are we, brothers and sisters in Christ, connected to one another through the love of God.

Joined together at baptism, sustained and nourished through word and meal, we are bound together in a love that remains despite our differences. And as we find ourselves at the end of our Easter celebration, in the time after Jesus' ascension but before Pentecost when we remember when the promised advocate was sent upon those earliest Christians, we are sent out into the world.

Though the world can be a dangerous, threatening place, we are restored, supported and strengthened by the very love of God that, instead of forgetting about us, instead of abandoning us and leaving us standing alone on the sidewalk, instead unites us together as children of God in this time and this place.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

Copyright © 2008, Michael K. Louia. All rights reserved.