

Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2020

Rev. Jane McDougle

Acts 7:55-60, 1 Peter 2:2-10, Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, John 14:1-14

Abiding in God

I wonder what it is that you need today? What have you come to see? What have you come to experience?

Perhaps it is the warmth of your community, remembered and virtually experienced. The sweetness of this space. The nourishment of scripture and prayer. The comforting familiarity of a Sunday morning worship service.

I hope that you are finding all these things. I'm so glad we are here together.

As I was musing on the week, and today's scriptures, I found myself singing an old hymn from the early nineteenth century. I think you'll know it:

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord with me abide:
when other helpers fail and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me"

I need thy presence every passing hour;
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

*wds Henry Francis Lee; music, Henry Monk
Hymn #662, Hymnal 1982*

In our scriptures for today, it's not that bad things aren't happening, or about to happen: the first deacon Stephen is being stoned, and Jesus is about to be arrested. Rather, it is that in the challenge, pain, and grief, we are not alone: we can abide with and in God, and God in us.

We don't use the word 'abide' very often in our fast-paced world, and I think we are the poorer for it. It is a beautiful old word, filled to the brim with sustaining indwelling, mutual warmth and support.

Our scriptures today are filled with promises of just these lovely things: Just what the Hebrew people needed; Just what Jesus' disciples needed, just what Peter's early Christian audience needed, and just what we, in these days of pandemic, need.

We know that this virus is not going to just disappear, even if we really want it to. It is causing great suffering to the whole world and will for some considerable time to come.

Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled”. The darkness will deepen, but we will not be abandoned. There is room for each one of us which is comforting in itself. Thomas however is anxious. How will we know the way? Jesus tells him, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

In his letter, however, Peter invites us to go one step further:

*Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals
yet chosen and precious in God's sight,
and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house*

If all we can do is to cling to the rock of our salvation, our psalmist reassures us that that is okay. However, Peter is suggesting that we can do more. Yes, Jesus is a living stone, but we are also living stones! And as living stones, we are not just being invited to hang out in a comfortable dwelling place, we are being invited to let ourselves be built into a spiritual home with Jesus.

Which is perhaps exactly what we have a sense of when we come to this holy space on a Sunday morning! And why we keep returning. Here is where we know that God invites each one of us to abide in God and with God. And, filled with that knowledge, we can go out into the world, living that invitation in every aspect of our lives, and welcoming in all those who live in the shadows.

In the words of this morning's collect:

*as you have opened for us your house of many rooms,
so may we make a place for the rejected and unloved and share the work of peace*

I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.