

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

Acts 6:1-7; 1Peter 2:4-9; & John 14:1-12

What do you want to do once the sheltering-in-place order has been lifted? Do you long to return to the life you lived before the pandemic? Have you been sneaking some activities that are technically still not allowed? It is hard not to, with all this talk of reopening the country, flattening infection rates and, perhaps most of all, gorgeous spring weather. What do we want the new normal to look like?

As we look to the wide-open future from the jail of our present, Jesus wants to shape our perspective. In this Sunday's gospel, he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled... In my Father's house... I am going to prepare a place for you." As always, he encourages us to set aside our anxiety. Such good advice for this time! Jesus then backs up this advice by saying he is getting a home ready for us with God. This is a promise, something for the future, but then Jesus does something funky with the timeline: "Where I am going, you have known the way." A future place is known already? In response to Thomas' confusion – "We do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" -- Jesus answers, "I am the way." Of course! The disciples have known him! They have been with him as he healed and liberated and loved. The promise of the future is not a vague something out there somewhere, but a loving relationship that is real in the present, which is, after all, the only time we have.

The Way-that-is-Jesus is also the Truth and the Life. He is God's thought and will, incarnated for us to see – our Truth. He is Life itself, source and content. We cannot live apart from him (Jn15:5). He makes our lives the best and fullest they can be (Jn10:10). Christianity is not a photo on the shelf; it is the stuff of daily life. As we live today, we are relating to Jesus, who is in our midst when two or three gather in his name (Mt 18:20). We relate to Jesus in the person in need (Mt 25:40); he remains with us always, even to the end of time (Mt 28:20). Christians place their hope in a person, not a plan or a manual. That person, as Jesus declares repeatedly, is the meeting point of humanity and God: "If you know me, you will also know my Father." In short, the Kingdom of God is at hand in this moment in our relationship with Jesus.

Humans are all about relationships, a truth we have rediscovered in the pandemic. Always with our families, we hammer out our differences and laugh together. Health care workers have become the families who keep bedside vigil. Our vulnerability has heightened our empathy for the poor whose circumstances increase their vulnerability. This compassion swelling in our hearts is the place in the Father's house that Jesus is preparing for us. His compassion is our path, revealed in the gospels and also in our daily lives. We are blessed in this tragic time to be more attuned to it.

As we contemplate our future, let us come to Jesus as living stones. Let him put us to use in building the Kingdom of God now. He is the cornerstone – meaning our pattern as well as that which undergirds all we do. 1Peter calls us both a spiritual house and a holy priesthood; we are parts of a whole. One stone alone cannot make a building; one person alone is not a priesthood. Each of us has a role to play. We must work together to reimagine our society and our church to address the needs of the world today. For we have seen firsthand those needs: the loneliness, the anxiety, the suffering, the hunger, the desire to control and the panic when we cannot. Jesus has already begun using us to build a new world. We have discovered how technology can connect us for visiting, worship and sharing resources. We have slowed our damaging of the planet. We have taken time to be silent and to relate with one another. We have had to get creative about a lot of things. Let's keep doing all these good things and more! We can increasingly harness the generous, compassionate energy of the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The story from Acts demonstrates how a crisis can be a launching point for goodness. Tensions arose because the needy among the Aramaic-speaking Christians were getting better treatment than the needy among the Greek-speaking Christians. Instead of letting division destroy it, the Church broadened ministry from the twelve apostles to include seven deacons. Twelve stands for Israel, while seven represents universality. Everyone was included in the responsibilities of living compassion. Likewise, we can step into our role in the priesthood of believers. No excuses now! Each one of us knows the Way.

- ❖ Dream with a friend about the compassion you envision for the post-pandemic world.
- ❖ Where do you want the Church to place its energies going forward? What gifts do you bring to that effort?

© 05/04/20, Bernadette Rudolph