

“Love’s Oneness”
Text: Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53
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For the last 5 1/2 months, since the first Sunday in December, we have followed Jesus through the key events in his earthly life. Through liturgy, scripture and sermons, we have been invited to find connecting points between his life and our own. Speaking of myself, I’ve been able to do that. While an angel’s announcement to the Virgin Mary is well-outside of my experience, I can relate to the miracle and wonder, the holy and mysterious gift of birth. A baby doesn’t have to be blood-related for me to stop, admire and feel delight welling up inside. Jesus’ baptism is a cue to examine the direction and the values of his life. That event connects with times of discernment in my own life at major turns - college, marriage, priesthood, applying for jobs and deciding it was time to move on. Like Jesus, I have been drawn or pushed into the wilderness where I wrestled with my own demons to discover or rediscover my true self.

Even the difficult events of Holy Week make sense to me albeit in less extreme ways. A few times my life have brought me to an intense ending somewhat like the Last Supper. Outside events and personal choices made such a deep impact that the relationships were altered and even severed. What followed felt like a crucifixion of sorts - the vulnerability, the testing of loyalty, the fear, grief and loss. And there are many Holy Saturdays in my life when I simply must wait. I must simply hold empty. Ah, and Easter Sunday, that part of Jesus’ story is wonderfully mirrored in my life - a new beginning, seeing with new eyes, getting a second chance, sharing my joy with others. I can relate to the resurrection appearances too. Like many of you, I have heard, sensed, dreamed and felt the presence of a loved one after their death. It’s good that we have several weeks in the Easter season to proclaim: Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed.”

Finally, the last key event in Jesus’ earthly life is here: Ascension. Both the passage in Acts of the Apostles and Luke describe the last of Jesus’ resurrection appearances. With final words outlining their future work and a blessing, Jesus disappears. This time my imagination, my ability to tease out such an event in my own life hits a wall. Jesus’ ascension is beyond me, no pun intended. So, I’m tempted to put Jesus’ ascension in the category of a bible story I can never connect to my life and so must just “believe”. Thus, could be the end of a very short sermon.

But wait. Part of our common journey over the last months was also to understand Jesus as wisdom teacher. During Lent, we reflected on what Jesus’ life and message might be saying beneath his actions and parables. As the incarnation of God’s Love, Jesus comes to transform us from the inside out. Through his teaching and healing, Jesus shows us what living fully from love looks like. His life is one of gathering people not excluding them. His is a life of forgiving, not holding on to judgement and anger. His is a life of examining traditions and rules which have become justification and rationalization not to change. His is a life intentionally moving more and more into being full of God’s Love - letting God’s love touch others and letting God’s love touch him. In short, Jesus lives in the oneness of love. He lives and dies fully in Love’s Oneness.

In so many ways, Jesus tries to help us “get” Love’s Oneness. He tells a parable in which a Samaritan enemy is the only one who cares for an injured Jew. He touches the skin of a leper and praises a lowly woman’s act of kindness. He lifts up bread and wine, and with words, offers a tangible spiritual connection not only with him, but with all who share. He calls himself the “good shepherd” of one flock and knows everyone’s name. He is Love’s Oneness like a vine whose life-giving sap flows to every branch without distinction.

One might say that Jesus could have ended his messages of Love’s Oneness there. It would have been enough. Yet, I believe, in his last appearance and ascension, Jesus again shows Love’s Oneness. The scene could not be more dramatic or mind-stretching. In both readings, the verbs used to describe Jesus’ departure convey a sense of slow motion. No quickly vanishing. This time Jesus is “taken”. Jesus is “carried”. Clearly this resurrection appearance is different with something not to be missed. In this appearance, there is earth and there is heaven. His human body is in between. Maybe, just maybe that’s finally and fully what Jesus, the wisdom teacher, wants to teach us. In Jesus’ ascension, we see finally and fully that an earthly life can be lived in Love’s Oneness. To follow Jesus is to find and hold Love’s Oneness as a spiritual space we experience in our very human body.

Now, I’ve come to the real test for me: can I find a way to connect? If this understanding is anywhere close to true, can I find a way to connect with this last key event in Jesus’ life? Has there ever been such a time, even a nanosecond, of that kind of living in the “Eternal Now”, as one phrase puts it? When there was a kind of “floating”, of being “caught in mid-air”, of being “carried away”, being neither here nor there, but somehow wonderfully both?

What about you? Has there been any experience in your life in which Love’s Oneness took or carried you into holy moments touching both heaven and earth? Anything come to mind - or rather emerge from your heart and perhaps bring tears to your eyes?

On this Mother’s Day, I suggest one we have all experienced: our life in our mother’s womb. Few, if any, can recall those months of total oneness as oxygen and blood literally flowed between. Yet, it happened for each of us. That’s how we and Jesus began our earthly journey. And, perhaps, like Jesus, that total oneness is how we will end our earthly journey after physical death. That we can’t know for sure. Yet, I believe for certain that Jesus’ ascension wonderfully means something for our life in between birth and death. Jesus is inviting us to follow him into deeper and deeper experiences of Love’s Oneness in every nanosecond of the gift of the earthly life we have been given. Amen.