

Year C Sixth Sunday of Easter God Refuses to Love From a Distance John 14 vv23 to 29 and Rev21 10 and vv22 to Rev22 v5

The Holy Spirit is our star actor today, appearing in all three of our readings. The Spirit provides a vision to Paul in order to guide his travels. The Spirit is enabling John – the author of Revelation – to experience a whole series of visions about the coming fulfillment of God’s kingdom on earth. And, in the Gospel, Jesus explains the astounding gift of the Spirit to his disciples. So let’s talk about the Spirit for a minute.

The Holy Spirit is described for us as active, constantly on the move in a variety of ways. The Spirit preaches and encourages (1 Cor.14:3). He teaches (Phil.4:2). He is our consolation (Matt.5:4). Jesus, in words that may at first seem confusing, tells his disciples that he is both going and coming. Jesus of Nazareth is leaving to be in the full presence of God but Jesus – the Word of God – is coming to us in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. When you have one with you, all are with you. The Holy Spirit draws us into the presence of the Holy Trinity – into the presence of God – which is an astounding reality, is it not? We are constantly in the presence of God, part of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Spirit, the breath of God, dwells within us. And, since we discover in Scripture, that God is good and all good comes from God (Ps.16:2; Mark 10:18), we have God’s perfect love, perfect joy, perfect peace – that cannot come from the world – because we are made one with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. When there is nothing but good, there is, then, nothing but love. We are caught up in the bonds of love in the oneness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is an amazing reality, isn't it? We are in the presence of God, swimming in God's love – to paraphrase Mother Theresa – because, as we have learned through Scripture, God refuses to love from a distance. *God refuses to love from a distance*. God came to us in Jesus the Christ and, through the mystery of baptism in which we participate in his death and resurrection, gave us the way to always have him with us.

The Spirit teaches and guides – reveals to us everything we need to know about being one with God and following God's ways. But being a disciple is more than what we know and it is more than what we do because the Spirit teaches and guides in relationship – a relationship founded in love. The Spirit connects the Church to God and to one another. He is the continuing presence of Jesus in the community helping us to be the Church – the one body of Christ together in the world. Why?

Because when we live as one – connected in perfect love to each other and to God – a transformation occurs...a transformation of self, of others, and of the world around us. Jesus says that he came that we may have life – and have it abundantly. When we live the reality of God's kingdom, the abundant life which is ours to live now, then an amazing thing happens. More and more of the brokenness of the world falls away to reveal more and more of the fulness of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. This abundant life, this life of living God's perfect love, is shown to us in John's Book of the Revelation.

Before we explore the imagery of the wholeness of God's kingdom in the Book of Revelation, let's remember that the word "revelation" is the English translation of the Greek word "apokalypsis". So, apocalypse is not a word for war or conflict or

destruction. If that's the definition of apocalypse that you know, please throw that in the garbage bin. Apocalypse means revelation, unveiling. It actually literally means lifting the cover and this revelation relayed to us by John opens our eyes to the fulfilment of God's purpose for all creation. It is the purpose of a God of love and so it is no surprise at all that God's purpose is to accomplish the wholeness of love in and among all things.

The imagery we see today helps us understand how that love will transform us and the world around us. Some of this imagery makes little sense to our 21st century minds so let's look at it together. The first thing that strikes us is all the talk about light. God provides all of the light in the new creation formed by the uniting of heaven of earth. Throughout the gospels – especially in the Gospel of John – light means understanding and, in particular, understanding what Jesus is trying to teach us about God. We still talk in those terms. If someone tells us something and we understand what they mean, we will often say, “I see.” But light is also used to describe what we do with this understanding of God. “Let your light so shine before others.” What is “light” in that sentence? We are to show God's love to the world through our good works.

There is no temple in this city of light because God is the temple. In Christian language, we would say there is no need for church buildings, the presence of God is the church and we have the presence of God within us. Wherever and whenever we gather to pray and to praise, we are the church. God will be among us and within us. The gates to this city are wide open. It is a welcoming place. Anyone can choose to enter into this life with us, leaving behind the brokenness of the world's way of thinking and being.

Talk of brokenness naturally leads into the next imagery...that of water. Water figures prominently throughout all of Scripture, from beginning to end, because water is the source of life. Jesus, then, with the abundant life he offers, is called the living water – the water we truly need. It is through the waters of baptism that we receive this living water.

The Tree of Life is straddling the river of the waters of life. The tree's abundant and never-ending supply of fruit tells us of God's provision that will fill all our needs, all the time. The leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations, we are told. 'The nations' is a broad, inclusive term that calls back to mind God's promise to Abraham – through you all the families of the earth will be blessed, God told him. God's wholeness is for everyone. Even the multitude of leaves on a small tree outside our door would keep us busy counting for quite a while. Again, we are meant to envisage the abundant, never-ending provision of God. God's healing will not run out. All brokenness will be mended. When we think of springtime, when nature is reawakening after a long, cold winter, the sight of new leaves on the trees fills us with joy and hope. They are new growth and the renewal of life...signs of more good things to come. The Tree of Life is all of this and more. It is always in bloom, always providing joy and hope.

The Tree of Life and the river of the waters of life were, of course, also at the beginning of our salvation story. The Garden of Eden is the imagery of wholeness God intends for all creation. The rest of scripture takes us through our long journey *with* God and against God as we learn how to live according to God's ways in order for the fulfillment of God's purpose to be accomplished. Our journey of learning is long and winding and brings us to the conversation in John's Gospel

today. Jesus is going but also coming, he says – giving us the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit so that, with his help, we will reach the fulfillment of the journey...the new creation formed when the region inhabited by God and the region inhabited by God's creation are fully and completed joined together into one region – God's will and God's kingdom on earth as in heaven.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God. Jesus tells us that those who love him will keep his teachings and God will make his home in us. As Love itself inhabits us, we become that love and radiate that love. God refuses to love from a distance and so must we so that the world will be relentlessly drawn ever closer to the wholeness God intends. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid...Believe.