

Easter 6 Year A 17th May 2020

John 14:15-21 *'You will do even greater works than I'*

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

Last week we were reflecting on Jesus reassuring his disciples just before his death. He says to them, 'Do not your hearts be troubled'. And then he gives this picture of how he is going to the place where he 'abides' or 'rests'. I used the analogy of me travelling over the Nullabor plain and needing to find a place of 'rest' each night, so I used a phone app in which previous travellers give their testimony to good places of rest. I suggested that Jesus ramps this up to a whole new level because Jesus testimony to his 'place of abiding' is first-hand. Jesus abides with God the Father. We can trust that God the Father (or Mother because it's a relational term – not a gender term...God the Father is good because God reveals God's self in the goodness and faithfulness of Jesus. So we can be confident of entrusting ourselves to this God, like a child can entrust themselves to a loving parent – Father or Mother.

This week's reading follows on immediately from last week in John's gospel. We may be able to discern a trajectory in the theme of the Easter readings. In the first four weeks we heard a series of resurrection accounts from the first witnesses. And now we have moved into a quite profound reflection on where Jesus has gone and where we are going as a result. The raised Christ is calling us INTO the life of God.

Jesus puts it this way: he says, *'Because I live, you too will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you'* (14:20). Another way that John's gospel puts it is that we are being 'grafted' onto Christ, like a plant being grafted into a root stock. And because we are grafted into Christ, where he goes, we also go. Because he is going to the Father, he takes us with him. It's like the parents of a young child who pack the car to go for a nice holiday to Albany – and the child says, 'where are you going?' to which the parents say, *'we're going to Albany – and, by the way, you're coming too – we're not going to ping off and leave you orphaned.'*

This beautiful image of being taken **into** the life of God – the place of our abiding – is the primary image of salvation for the Eastern Church.

One of the early church theologians put it this way – God became human in order to take us into the life of God and make us divine' (paraphrase *)

And this isn't just a pie in the sky promise for when we die – it's a present reality being brought about by the Holy Spirit. Jesus says to his disciples,

*"I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, that he may be with you throughout the age, the Spirit of Truth, which the cosmos cannot receive because he neither sees nor knows it; you know it because it **abides** with you and will be **within you**'.*

Can we see how it all ties together. Jesus abides **in** the Father; We abide **in** Jesus; Jesus abides **in** us; the Spirit abides **in** us.

The technical language for this is 'trinitarian participation'. **It is our destiny to be relationally wrapped up into the life of a God.** Or, as I heard someone express this gospel last week, *'God is good and has a wonderful plan for your life'*.

So how might that plan for our life play itself out right now? Well, the amazing thing is that it will be play out differently for every person on this planet. But one thing which is true in all cases, is that the plan for our lives is tied up somehow with loving relationships.

CS Lewis captured this in a couple of lovely passages:

"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship"

[C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, Collier Books, 1980), 18.]

In a more complete statement on his beliefs, C.S. Lewis wrote, in his book, "Mere Christianity (p.175)" as follows:

The command Be ye perfect is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were "gods" and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.

Jesus says at 14:12 'very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these'

Jesus as Jesus can only do what he does by his mutual indwelling in the Father, so WE can only do God's work through such a mutual indwelling. Anything else will just be a limited exercise of our ego. We will be very subject to ego inflation, using other people for our own purposes, or burn out.

What we are invited to, however, is a process of consent to the life God working in us as we are drawn into the life of God. In the same way that Jesus said, so we say, 'I can do nothing on my own'. I believe that this is partly what is happening in the prayer of the heart in meditation. Every time we take our distracted mind and refocus it on our word, 'ma-ra-na-tha', we are consenting to God's Spirit working in us. We are saying yes to what St Paul says is the renewing of our minds (nous). (Philippians 2:5; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Cor.2:16). This new mind is characterised by joy and peace (Romans 15:13).

I'll finish with an illustration:

When the Nicean councils were meeting in the fourth century to try to resolve the wording of the Creeds of the church, (what become known as the Nicean Creed), a few of the Bishops got together and hatched the idea that every cathedral and monastery should also become a place of healing – a kind of foreshadowing of our modern hospitals. The first nurses and doctors in Europe, on any kind of scale, were monks and nuns. By the 10th century as Benedictine monasteries expanded through Europe it is estimated that thousands of hospitals in monasteries in hospitals had been established. And those become the forerunners of modern health care.

Even as Jesus was departing and apparently going to his final death, he says to his disciples, *'do not let your hearts be troubled....you will do even greater works than I'*.

*In the early 2nd century, the theologians St, Irenaus put it this way:

*"[T]he Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."*⁴

[Irenaeus, "Book 5, Preface", Against Heresies, retrieved 2012-11-06]