

**Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**April 27, 2008**

**Easter 6A 2008**

In the Name of our one living God, ever creating, ever loving, and ever sustaining:  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's Gospel lesson continues from last Sunday's. The setting is the Last Supper and Jesus is preparing his closest friends and disciples for what is about to occur. He seeks to prepare them for what will happen and explain the meaning of it all. Here, Jesus speaks about life without him. "I will not leave you orphaned," he promises them, "I am coming to you. In a little while the world will not see me, but you will see me; because I live you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you." Those are two packed sentences!

Here Jesus answers a question of the original disciples – Can we still love and be in relationship with Jesus when he is gone? He also answers a question that must have been on the mind of John's Community as those last few who personally knew or saw Jesus were dying off – can future generations know and love Jesus without having had a personal relationship and knowledge of him? The answer to these concerns is yes, but the way to this "yes" might have surprised them.

Jesus is saying "no" to an emotional personality cult. The way to stay in relationship with me, he says, is not by clinging onto memories of me or of our personal relationship. The way to continued relationship with Jesus, he says is **"by doing my works"** and **"by keeping my commandments."** Jesus tells them to move

beyond whatever their private experiences and memories may be. When they go into the world and live as he lived, teaching as he taught and loving as he loved, then they will experience and be in relationship with the living Jesus. When they live into the life of Jesus they will not only find him but find that through him they have entered the life of God.

Think about it. All throughout all the Gospel accounts of Jesus' works, Jesus is always saying "It's not about me folks; it is about the Father's love for you and all Creation." Whenever Jesus teaches, he is always saying, "These are not my words and ideas, folks; this is stuff the Father wants you to know and understand." Whenever Jesus healed or did great works, he was always saying, "Don't look at me; I am just showing you the power of the Father's love." The loving relationship between Jesus and the Father was not some private one for their sole benefit. No, it was lived out publicly for the benefit of all Creation! There couldn't have been a more public person than Jesus. He went everywhere offering God's love – relationship to God – to *all*.

Yes, later generations can have a loving relationship with Jesus and the Father. However it must be modeled on the relationship of Jesus and the Father. It cannot be a private one for their own benefit but a public one lived out in the world for the benefit of all Creation. I think Jesus' words have meaning for every generation and are directed always to all humanity.

I think Paul's experiences in Athens as told in our reading today from the Book of Acts might sound familiar to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears. This nice Jewish boy suddenly finds himself not only a disciple of this Jesus whom he once persecuted, but now is in one of the most cosmopolitan cities. Coming from Jerusalem, he is at first offended

by what was a common 1<sup>st</sup> Century sight in most big cities – temples and altars of all sorts of deities and cults sitting check to jowl next to one another. Each offered something – wealth, victory in war, a good erotic life, ageless beauty, a happy home. You name the human need or desire and there was apt to be a god there to give it to you if approached that deity in the right way!

Does any of this sound familiar? Been to the Ala Moana Mall lately? Las Vegas? In our modern American secular world, many of our temples are stores or gyms or bars or cults or whatever. If you listen to some of our televangelists, you know some are still churches.

Today's Gospel tells us we enter the love of Christ and the life of God by living the life of Jesus and thus his relationship with the Father by keeping his commandments and doing his works. How can we possibly do this without Jesus? Again, it is because we are not to be orphaned. Jesus promises that another Advocate will be with us forever – the spirit of truth who will abide with us and be in us forever. That is a promise that I find myself clinging to more and more tightly as the world becomes more complex and Christianity recedes to the edges of society.

While I have been preaching during this Easter season from the Gospel lessons appointed from the lectionary, many of the second readings have been from the First Letter of Peter. I have found myself reflecting on the contrasting messages of these two readings each Sunday and maybe it is time to say something about this disconnect. In general, the Gospel lessons from John are about the deep relationship between the Creator and Creation and the role of the Incarnate Word – Jesus Christ – in bringing all humanity into relationship with God and bringing God's kingdom – the Universe as God would have it be – into existence. It is very spiritual and radical

stuff. We and the world change by opening ourselves to God and entering into relationship with the divine.

First Peter, on the other hand, marks the start of Christianity as civil religion and civic virtue. It exhorts its readers to patience, conforming to civil authority and being good role models by being virtuous citizens. Now there is nothing wrong with this – indeed, most of us grew up with this as our way of doing church. It is how church has been done in some fashion for the last 1,500 years. The State, society and religion reinforced one another. But that is not true anymore, is it? The Church (and all religious faith) has been pushed to the fringes of society. Oh we may perform some useful services at major life events, but in general we are far from relevant. The more liberal in the church embrace modern ideas and seek to find how God is acting in them. The conservative right in the church seeks to reestablish the church and society more or less as it was 50 years ago. Neither approach seems to be accomplishing much other than a lot of noise and dissension. As important as our differences may be to some of us, the reality is that to most of the world today they are a side show and not a particularly interesting one at that!

We live in a world undergoing great changes and stresses. Our environmental issues may already be at or beyond the tipping point. The price of rice has risen 85% in 5 months – not much to us but a matter of life and death in places where people live on a dollar or two a day. Already there are food riots in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. In the U.S., mortality rates are declining in poorer areas mostly because of bad habits such as smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise and addictive behaviors. This, I am afraid, is a harbinger of things to come.

What should Church look like in **this** kind of world? I believe our focus should be on **faith and mission**. We are called to be a place where we do believe that are not left orphaned but have the Spirit as our guide. This is all we have to offer the world – the truth that we are always loved by God and the hope and change that that brings!

How do we do this? By being a people who return to the Gospel – the Good News that is Jesus Christ – and continue **doing his works** and **keeping his commandments**. This is done publicly and in community. It is what we have been given to give. When we start living out what we believe and working together, the world will notice.

Amen.