

“Homemaking”
Easter 6c
John 14:23-29

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Grace Lutheran Church
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In Jesus' Name.

The gospel reading begins rather abruptly giving Jesus' answer to Judas not Iscariot. Imagine going through life being introduced as Judas not Iscariot. We start with Jesus' answer to him, but what was the question. A little background is in order. Jesus was preparing his disciples for his absence. In just a few hours will come in quick succession his betrayal, arrest, trial and execution. With all that looming he said to them, “I will not leave you orphaned. The world will no longer see me but I will reveal myself to you.” The way Jesus goes about it is not all that different from the way we take leave of our loved ones. We try to comfort them and ourselves, saying, “I'll be back. I'll see you again soon.” Jesus was giving comfort to his disciples, preparing them for his absence.

We, on the other hand, are well prepared to cope with Jesus' absence. It is his presence that would surprise us. About a year and a half ago we started work on a project called Congregational Discovery. In one of the phases of the project nine or ten members of our congregation were trained to interview other members. It is called an ethnographic study. They asked things like, “Tell a memory that that has given you anxiety about the future of this church. Tell a memory that gives you hope.” I talked at length with the folks who do this work with congregations. They said there is very little talk about God in the answers people give. They said the pastors are no different. We talk about what we are doing, our programs, and our efforts, but there is little talk about what God might be up to.

People ask me from time to time, “Why did you become a pastor?” Within the safe walls of this place it is easy for me to answer, “Because God called me to it. It is my vocation, my calling.” I find myself less comfortable with God-talk outside these safe walls, less comfortable with God-talk when I'm the professional God-talker. Then my answer devolves to things like, “I grew up in the church. I saw the difference the church made during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. There were several pastors who were inspirations to me. I saw how they shepherded people through difficult times.” Do you hear any talk about God in that answer? Neither do I.

If you are asked why you took up your job or why you married or why you chose to raise a family, would there be any mention of God in your answers? My concern is that we seem to be functional atheists Sunday afternoon through Saturday. We operate without reference to God, at least not much. We are well schooled in the secular catechism that has stripped God out of everyday life and put human reason in charge. Sunday morning God-talk has not infiltrated our Monday to Saturday worlds so much as the other way around. Monday through Saturday considerations have pushed into sacred space. I understand our concerns. We do want to fit in and not be judged as religious fanatics. Also we know that people sometimes, we sometimes confuse our desires with God's will. We have known people who use God-talk to manipulate or dominate others. A sticky-sweet piety keeps others at arms' length and elevated just slightly above them. A good dose of humility is necessary when we speak of what God is doing in our lives. That is because God does not show up in a big flashy display. That is what Judas not Iscariot wanted, what the other disciples wanted, what we want.

Where does God show up? He shows up on a cross. This is not the sign to abandon ship, every man and woman for themselves, all is lost. Rather at the cross Jesus reveals God. At the cross he provides the grounds of our faith. At the cross Jesus took to himself all the sorrow and enmity of the human race. He took to himself the brokenness of the world. With his arms outstretched on the cross he took all this into his embrace in order to mold it into God's new creation.

Joseph Harvard is a pastor in Durham, North Carolina. He writes, "Several years ago I attended an urban ministry conference in San Francisco. On our program was a pastor whose congregation was the young people on the streets. They were living as prostitutes, using drugs, lost with little hope. He told us about getting to know them, building trust, offering them a different life. After his presentation, I told him how impressed I was and how impossible the work seemed.

"He invited me to join him that evening as he made his rounds.... Reluctantly, I went along. I watched him encounter one difficult situation after another. Later, I asked him, 'How do you do it? How do you get up every day and go about this business of working with these young people whose lives have been so mangled? It's hard to know how they could get put back together.' He stopped, looked straight at me, and said, 'It's easy to tell you how I do it – the

Resurrection.’ He had heard about a new reality, and he had decided to live out of that new reality and to offer it to those on the street.”¹

Jesus shows up on a cross. It was the means by which God fashioned the new reality. And then Jesus shows up at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus told his disciples, “If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father....” His mission is to restore the creation to God. And so he does with his return. He returns the first born of the new creation in order to prepare the heavenly host for our arrival.

He will not leave us orphaned in the mean time. He promises that by the Holy Spirit both the Father and he come to make their home in us. The Holy Trinity come to keep company among us. They do so in the ordinary stuff of life, like the bathwater of baptism and a plain meal of bread and wine. God is the divine homemaker. Here is affirmation aplenty for the calling to be spouse and parent. Here is affirmation aplenty for mothers and all who care for children. May we be for God a hospitable home by our love for Jesus and our trust in his word of promise to us. Love and trust are key to homemaking.

So, where is it that God shows up? A person from southern California writes about his experience volunteering at a ministry for the homeless. He says that much of the work is heartbreaking. “But what was frustrating to me were the sane, young, vital healthy men who seemed to have chosen a life of hovels and handouts and scams. I had just read an article in our California newspaper about a factory town in Nebraska that was desperate for workers, and I mention the possibility of that to a regular.... And he said, ‘Oh, I couldn’t go to Nebraska. It’s too cold!’

“‘You sleep in the streets,’ I wanted to scream.

“‘Some people,’ a social worker told me, ‘can do fine at a job for a day or two. But it’s the sheer dailiness that gets to them.’”²

And it is in the sheer dailiness that God shows up in our lives. Our Confirmands got that right. The witness service was a couple of weeks ago. Pastor Faulstich collected all their witnesses printed them a booklet, copies of which are available in the rack in the narthex. Read through them. God shows up on the baseball diamond, in the classroom, and recital hall. God

¹ Joseph S. Harvard, III, “Preaching the 2010 Easter Texts,” *Journal for Preachers*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, Easter 2010, 8-9.

² Ron Hansen, “Living by the Word: Sunday, May 9,” *The Christian Century*, May 4, 2010, p. 20.

shows up in family fights and family emergencies. One young man spoke about playing ice hockey. He reminded me of Eric Liddel, the devout Christian from Scotland, who ran in the 1924 Olympics. The movie "Chariots of Fire" tells his story. He said, "When I run I feel God's pleasure." In these witnesses God shows up on the school bus, giving timely lessons on the meaning of the first shall be last when sixth grade boys (quote) "played dirty and cut the girls in line..." There was not a single witness on the order of "Our team was down 3 to 0. The bases were loaded and it was my turn at bat. I prayed to God and I hit a home run and we won the game." There was one however, in which a young man shared his disappointment at not making the A team. Anybody else here have an experience like that? He said he was ashamed at his failure. He did not quit, which is what many people would do. He played for the B team and discovered God's presence in the friendship and support of his teammates. There were some statements that were downright profound, like this, "I have never gone through a day without sinning. But I don't think that I've gone through a day without thinking how Jesus died for our sins. This doesn't mean that these actions are justified, but it does mean that I can go to sleep at night with peace and hope that the next day will be better."

I've got an assignment for all of us, should we wish to accept it. Write your witness about how and where God, the Divine Homemaker, shows up in your lives. Turn them in to me. We won't make you read them in front of a whole congregation. But perhaps we'll produce another of these booklets. In Jesus' name, Amen.