

“Making Connections”
Pentecost Sunday
John 14:8-17, 25-27

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In Jesus' Name.

Jesus' ascension to the right hand of God the Father was observed a week and a half ago, but in the Gospel reading we are still stuck in the upper room with Jesus and his disciples, listening in on their post-dinner conversation. People are always looking for closure on difficult things like saying goodbye and difficult things like death and to move on to happier times. See we're wearing red and have moved on to Pentecost. However, the Gospel reading returns us to John 14 to hear yet again Jesus preparing his disciples for his absence. He told them that his return to the Father will make it possible for them to join him and God the Father in the family circle. Philip spoke up and said, “Show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Jesus replied, “If you see me you have seen the Father. If you know me, you know the Father.” Want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. Jesus said, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” “Believe me,” Jesus said twice more.

Jesus then told them, “The one who believes in me will do greater works than I do.” I have never heard anyone say they are doing greater works than Jesus did. But there it is in black and white. I think what Jesus had in mind is that what we preach and teach and do are based on the complete story of the Word made flesh, who dwelt among us, who was lifted up on a cross to draw all of us in, who was buried and rose and ascended into heaven.

Then Jesus taught them using a great piece of circular logic. I think the debate coach among us would have to mark him down for this. He says to love him is to keep his commandments and to keep his commandments is to love him. With such logic Jesus seeks to encircle them and us in the divine life.

Then Jesus let them in on their inheritance. Jesus reveals his will. He tells them what his bequest to them is. He bequeaths to them his peace. The word Jesus spoke to them would have been shalom. It is used to say goodbye. Shalom is more than the absence of conflict. Shalom is a sense of well-being and wholeness. To say shalom to someone is to bless them with the hope that their life will flourish. One of our fourth graders asked me, “Do you know what it feels like to be in heaven?” I answered, “Do you ever have the feeling that everything is all right? It is hard to describe because maybe nothing all that special has happened to you but you have the feeling that life is good and everything is going to turn out all right. I think that is God giving us a little advance on what it will feel like to be in heaven. That’s what shalom is. That is what Jesus bequeaths to us.

He gives us his peace as an antidote to cowardice. “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be cowardly.” Our text says afraid but cowardly is a better translation. I’m not sure I’ve ever before thought of peace as the opposite of cowardice, or fear, for that matter. The peace Jesus gives is the peace that experienced betrayal and execution. The peace Jesus gives is from the one who, in the face of death, trusted God’s promises to raise him to new life. His peace is the antidote to cowardice and fear.

Then I’m pretty sure the disciples said, “How are we supposed to remember all of this? How can we keep all of this straight? There is too much here to take in all at once.” And Jesus responded, “I know and that is why God will send to you the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.” They didn’t have to ask like we do, “What’s a paraclete?” Literally it means “one who is called to our aid.” The Paraclete comes to our side to render all kinds of aid. The Paraclete is mediator, intercessor, and advocate. The Paraclete exhorts, encourages, comforts, and cajoles. The Paraclete is God with us forever, the Spirit of truth who abides with us. The Paraclete teaches us

and reminds us what Jesus said and did. That is a tall order for any paraclete. But this paraclete is God. For all those various activities in this tall order there is one basic function being performed.

I saw that basic function put into action one Sunday morning by a little boy named Brett. It happened there under the north balcony. Brett was part of an extended family that came together for his grandfather's birthday. There were aunts and uncles, at least one great aunt and uncle and about a dozen cousins. The children of the man with the birthday came with their families and sat on the side of the church where they always sat when they were growing up and I think where their father sat with his siblings when he was growing up. On this Sunday they overflowed the family pew.

There is something you have to know about Bret. He has Down's Syndrome. When his mother was pregnant with him she knew early on about the presence of that extra 21st chromosome. A chromosome is such a small thing but it causes such great fear. She knew about the big difference it meant for her child and the impact it would have on her family. When she told her mother, her mother asked, "Are you going to exercise your legal option?" She said to her mother, "This is God's option for me." As she neared term the doctors said her son's heart was failing. She had them schedule a Caesarian birth to improve his chances for survival. Survive he did. He flourished. When Bret's grandmother came into the room that day and saw her daughter holding her new born son she said her daughter looked serene and happy. She was the picture of shalom. She named her son Bret, which was the name her mother called her father during their courtship and early married life.

This is the grandson who sat in the midst of the extended family the day of his grandfather's birthday. They were rendezvousing at the church and going to their parents' home from here. Some of them came in as worship was starting and so did not have the chance to greet

the others until after the service. So, after the service they formed a noisy knot of people, hugging one another, getting caught up with each other. The grandfather and grandmother looked on with pride. I went over to see what all the commotion was about. They filled me in on who was who. Bret was surrounded by cousins. The cousins were not as boisterous as their parents. They saw each other once a year at best and so it took some time for them to warm up to each other. Bret felt their discomfort. He has a sense for such things, the sort of things that people without the extra chromosome overlook or don't know what to do about. He was self conscious about speaking because often people do not understand what he says. What Bret did was to take one cousin by the hand and lead him over to another cousin. He put their hands together. And then he repeated with another set of cousins until he had them all connected and the ice was broken and they were talking and laughing with one another. It looked like shalom. It felt like shalom.

Making connections is the work of the Paraclete. Paraclete work is to connect us one to another and into the relationship of God the Father and God the Son. Theologians have a fancy word for the inner life of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They call it perichoresis, a Greek word which means circle round or dance. The Paraclete teaches us the dance step and the rhythm and invites us all into the circle. The Paraclete connects us by way of reminding us what Jesus said and did. The paraclete takes our hand and places it in Jesus' hand. The Paraclete connects us to God the Father by prayer, praying with us when we pray and praying in our stead when we don't know what to say. The Paraclete connects us to one another to form Christ's body in the world. The Paraclete then works through us so that we might make connections in Jesus' name, connections that look like shalom and feel like shalom. It is our inheritance. There is no limit to it. We have it to spend on a world in need of it. Shalom, may your lives flourish. Amen.