

The Sixth Sunday of Easter, 17 May 2009  
Saint James Episcopal Church, Tigard OR  
The Rev'd Raggs Ragan, Rector

“Abide in my love.” The focus of today’s Gospel is love, the love of God for us, of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father, and of us for God and one another. But love is not merely something we are supposed to feel or think about, or even do. This is love as a place to live. “Abide in my love.” We may have our abode in the mountains or by the sea, in a city or in the midst of a forest. We may abide in a lonely mansion, a crowded hotel or a monastery. It does not matter, because fundamentally, at the core of ourselves we are to abide in love, God’s love, our love for God, the love which is God, the love of God incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Just savor that notion for a while. Our true home is love. Only in love will we find rest. Only love truly defines us, as it truly defines God. Love is home.

If this is true, and our scriptures, as well as much of the rest of the profound religious thinking of the world, seem quite clear on this point, it is no wonder that so much is written about the quest for love, that so many people give up everything else in pursuit of love. We need love, to receive it and to give it. Only in love do we truly feel at home. The problem comes as we get confused about what constitutes love, how we are to recognize it, how we are to deserve and preserve it.

There would be a drastic decline in the magazine business and the publishing of fiction, poetry and self-help books, to say nothing of the television and film industries, if we all stopped thinking about love. That love is our only true home, the only base from which we can relate to ourselves or any part of the universe as we are meant to, is at the basis of the terrible nagging loneliness which afflicts so many. It is a consuming, ultimate homesickness.

What will it be like when we are truly at home in love? According to the Gospel, we will love one another and thus live according to Jesus’ example and commands. We will love all of our fellows, and even willingly lay down our lives for them. We will also be engulfed by divine joy. We will bear fruit for Christ in the world. Our at-homeness will also be notable for the absence of hatred and fear. As long as we nurture hatred, we cannot be said to be living in love. When we are fully rooted in love, we will no longer experience fear. Hatred and fear are both antithetical to love. Both are destructive of love, eat away at its power and beauty. Both give evidence of a hollowness where the confidence of love should be.

Fear and hatred are of course close allies. They nourish one another. We hate what we fear and we fear what we hate. These evil, soul-destroying emotions keep us isolated, while love is about binding everyone and everything together. Love is the end and source of life. Fear and hatred corrode life. It is easy to see how hatred is opposed to love. Hatred tears people apart, causes people to injure each other, and breeds isolation and discontent. Fear is not as obvious in its opposition, because it is more insidious. Fear causes us to pull

ourselves in, to minimize contact, to avoid risk. Fear prevents the kind of self-giving and vulnerability which are the core of love.

As I meditated on this image of abiding in love, of finding our home in love, I found myself drawn to two treasures in my home. Both were gifts from dear friends given at the time of my ordination, gifts with sleeping cats at their center. Anyone who knows me knows that I love cats. I often envy them the serenity that seems so natural to them. Like Christopher Smart's cat Jeffrey they are all so evidently "servants of the Living God, duly and daily serving Him."

The first gift is a small ceramic figurine of a woman in a rocking chair with a cat sleeping in her lap. When touched, it rocks slightly. In its blue and white simplicity, it incarnates a serenity that seems to be basic to living in love. If we truly live in love, we are at peace with ourselves and with the universe, we neither worry nor hurry. We can sit and rest and enjoy the beauty of the world.

The other gift is a drawing of a cat sleeping on a pillow, the absolute embodiment of contentment and peace. Surrounding the drawing in lovely simple calligraphy are the following words:

ALL THAT MATTERS

is to be at one with the living GOD

To be a creature in the house of the

GOD OF LIFE.

Like a cat asleep on a chair

At peace, in peace

And at one with the master

of the house, with the mistress

AT HOME ...

"At peace, in peace" – that is what it means to have love as our home. No hatred, no fear, no need for self-protection, no need for a plan of attack. We can rest in the lap of God in a life of continual prayer, ever aware of the divine presence in our world, secure in the divine protection, like a cat in a loving home. As we nestle in the embrace of love, our insecurities are stroked away and our strength is renewed.

But of course we cannot live entirely in sleepy contentment. While our inner selves are quieted by the comforting dialogue with our creator, love also drives us outwards into the world. In peace and at peace we are free to serve others.

Living in love means seeing the world and everyone in it through the eyes of love. It means that we look at other people not as threats to us, nor even as potential fillers of the great void in our hearts, but as fellow

children of a loving father, destined to live at one with each other in the house of love. This means we see their needs and their problems as obstacles to their peace, which is our peace. We are compelled to help them, as we look for ways to encompass them in the contentment of life with God.

Living in love is having a heart filled with divine love, joy, and peace, which travels with us even in the midst of hatred, anger and chaos. As we trust in the God of Love, we are able to live chaotic and risky lives as people at peace, as bearers of peace and light into a murky world.

Few, even among the saints, achieve this total serenity in their lives, but we all experience glimpses of it, and hold it as a goal and glowing possibility. We know that this is the destination of our lives in Christ. We recognize the serenity and power that flow from a life centered in divine love when we see it in others. We are stunned by people like Mother Theresa or Saint Francis, whose lives seem to sparkle with the image of Christ's incarnation of divine love. We are stunned – and yet we realize that these people are part of us, part of the Body of Christ, that we share their calling and that their closeness to the image of God in the world is possible to all of us.

Gracious and Loving God, fill our hearts and lives with your love which enlivens all that is, grant us grace, contentment, and peace as we gratefully settle into the home which you have prepared for us, in the name of the One who lived uniquely as your love in our world, even Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

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VI easter 2009

**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

O God, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee in all things and above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Easter 6 – May 17

Opening 203 O sons and daughters, let us sing  
Gradual 651 This is my Father's world (dif tune – Terra Beata)  
Offertory 213 Come away to the skies (good for funerals)  
Communion 335 I am the bread of life  
Closing 210 The day of resurrection

8am 651 This is my Father's world (dif tune – Terra Beata)

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; I John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Psalm 98 Cantate Domino

- <sup>1</sup> Sing to the Lord a new song, \*  
for he has done marvelous things.
- <sup>2</sup> With his right hand and his holy arm \*  
has he won for himself the victory.
- <sup>3</sup> The Lord has made known his victory; \*  
his righteousness has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.
- <sup>4</sup> He remembers his mercy and faithfulness to  
the house of Israel, \*  
and all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
- <sup>5</sup> Shout with joy to the Lord, all you lands; \*  
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.
- <sup>6</sup> Sing to the Lord with the harp, \*  
with the harp and the voice of song.
- <sup>7</sup> With trumpets and the sound of the horn \*  
shout with joy before the King, the Lord.
- <sup>8</sup> Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, \*  
the lands and those who dwell therein.
- <sup>9</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands, \*  
and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord,  
when he comes to judge the earth.
- <sup>10</sup> In righteousness shall he judge the world \*  
and the peoples with equity.

1 John 5:1-6

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