Sharing in the Love That Makes Us One

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Texts:
 John 17:1-11
 Acts: 1:6-14

**We are using the First Nation’s version of the English Bible today.**

**John 17:1-11** relates the final prayer that Jesus (Creator Sets Free) offers for his disciples, just before he is betrayed and handed over to the soldiers, chief priests and Pharisees, leading to his torture and death, followed by his resurrection.

What is so compelling to me about John 17 is that, in this context of what lies before him, Jesus’ heart and attention are focused on his followers and who they will become, not immediately, but eventually, as told through the stories in the New Testament.

John 17:9-11 shares Jesus’ prayer, which is a beautiful conversation with God:

These are the ones I now pray for. I am not praying for the ones who walk in the ways of the world, but for the ones you gave to me, for they belong to you. My followers bring honor to me; they are a gift from you, a gift we share together. Since I am returning to you, I will no longer be in the world, but my followers will still be here. Oh, Creator of all that is holy, watch over them with the loving care that we share with one another. In this way they will also share the love that makes us one.

The next two chapters of John relate the story of Jesus’ betrayal by Judas, his arrest, Peter’s three denials of Jesus, the scattering of the other disciples, and Jesus’ torture, crucifixion and burial. Chapters 20 and 21 tell of Jesus’ resurrection and his appearance first to Mary Magdalene and then to the other disciples, including seven men who had returned to their previous jobs as fisherman.

This will probably sound controversial, I suppose: This could have been how the story of a remarkable man who walked the earth ended if one thing hadn’t happened — Jesus’ disciples believed Jesus, embraced Jesus’ teachings, and underwent an astonishing transformation to embody the vision that Jesus held for them — *to share the love that makes us one*.

And as Jesus’ followers, we are walking that same path today — the Good Road — as it is described in the First Nations translation of the bible.

A couple of weeks ago, we were discussing the passage of John 14:12 where Jesus said, “I speak from my heart. The ones who trust in me will do the same things I do, and even greater things, for I am going away to my Father.” In our discussion there was some uncertainty of what this meant. But no matter how we understand this verse, today’s scripture makes clear that the embodiment of that vision that Jesus had for those who trust in him is to spread the good news, *to share the love that makes us one*.

The Acts passages for today, 1:6-14 describe the state of Jesus’ followers at the time of his ascension. They are still a little confused, looking for Jesus to lead, rather than taking up leadership themselves. They still don’t seem to get it. In Verse 6 they ask *“Wisdomkeeper (Lord), will you now give the Good Road back to the tribes of Wrestles with Creator (Israel)?”*

In Verse 8 Creator Sets Free (Jesus) answers with a different set of priorities:

“Set your hearts and minds on the Holy Spirit, who will give you strong medicine when it comes. You will then tell my story in Village of Peace (Jerusalem), in all the Land of Promise (Judea) and High Place (Samaria), and then to the furthest parts of the earth — to all languages, tribes and nations.”

And then Chapter 2 describes the day of Pentecost when *“the Holy Spirit came down upon them and began to fill them with life and power.”* Pentecost marks the transformation of the disciples from uncertain followers into committed leaders sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and Divine love that makes us one.

And we are now a part of that unfolding story. But how do we get there? How do I take my place in this story? After all, I am just little, old me.

Cynthia Bourgeault, a modern-day mystic, adds to this conversation in a way that gives me heart. Bourgeault sees us as standing midway between the purely material (our physical form) and the purely energetic (our spiritual form). Our basic animal instincts for survival are inherent in our nature and a part of who we are. “But so are the instincts of the highest degree of lucidity and clarity, our true angelic destiny.” And for Bourgeault, this is exactly where we should be, where we belong. Rather than working to “free” ourselves from the physical world to take our place in the spiritual world (which is a common and traditional interpretation of the path before us), Bourgeault says our purpose is “fulfilled in the way we move back and forth between these two planes of existence.” Our purpose is to walk between our physical instinct for survival in this world and our spiritual delight in Spirit, which transcends this world. Living where these “two seas meet” is where sacred existence is revealed through intentional living in this physical world. That’s where the rubber hits the road, where transformation in ourselves and in our world happens. That’s how we get miracles.

Using Church of the Saviour language, engaging in inward journey transformational work deepens our awareness of the Divine within, which, in turn, is expressed in outward journey work to transform the world around us into an expression of Divine Love. Bourgeault gives us the example of a candle.

The outer form is wax and wick. (*Lighting the candle***)**

But the purpose of the candle is revealed only when the candle begins to burn — to give of its outer form to release the heat and light it holds as potential. “Only then do we see what a candle really is: its outer life is wax and wick; its inner life is flame.” In terms of each of us, our willingness to light that flame within becomes our gift offered to others, “releasing the energy and beauty of the divine aliveness to the outer world.”

In other words, if it weren’t for the physical form of wax and wick, the flame could not glow. And without the glowing flame, the candle’s purpose is not complete. It is through our working out of how each of us is called to express the intertwining of physical and spiritual that we take our place of sacred existence in this unfolding love story between the Divine and Creation.

As we choose to embody individual expressions of heat and light, together they form a communal expression of Divine aliveness, for the benefit of all. In doing so, we set in motion our intention to become, like Christ, an embodied expression of Divine Love. And our continuing work is to lovingly let go of anything we are holding onto which does not serve this sacred purpose. For me, this holy work is best accomplished by embracing our shadow, the parts of us we do not want to acknowledge, much less, let others know about. That’s how we internally “share the love that makes us one” and bring our whole selves into the light.

*(Lighting the candle)*

As I mentioned earlier, next Sunday is Pentecost, when we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples and the transformation of a fearful and confused band of Jesus’ followers into the founders the Christian church. In our lectionary readings for next week, we will read all about that.

And as we prepare ourselves for Pentecost, I invite you to ponder on the question — what are you holding onto that does not serve your expression of God’s divine purpose in this world?

In the Church of the Saviour’s tradition, Pentecost is also when each one of us makes a decision about the kind of membership commitment we wish to offer to our faith community for the coming year. This year, we will hold that Recommitment Sunday on June 4th and we will use candles during that ceremony. You will soon receive an email from Marcia via the 8th Day listserv explaining what this means, so you have time to think about what kind of commitment seems right to you for this coming year.

In the meantime, as you and I each continue to wrestle with how we would like to engage in living where the “two seas meet” and sacred existence is revealed through intentional living in this physical world, I leave you with an interpretation of John 15:12-13, where we are instructed by Jesus to love each other as Jesus loved us. This interpretation is by Neil Douglas-Klotz, who re-works the Aramaic into English for a deeper understanding.

This is my bequest to you –
let it measure you regularly,
stirring you to review your life:
Just as I have kindled a big fire
from leaves and twigs in you,
just as a seed led you to
full-bloomed love for me,
use the small and weak
to kindle and grow the
mystery of love for each other
and for the “other” parts of self.
The most powerful way
to love like this asks you to
sacrifice your images
of who you think you are,
To work inside before
You respond outside,
 to feel Alaha’s (the Divine’s) impatience for love
In your own.