

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Pentecost C; 9 June 2019
St. Thomas, Glassboro – Todd Foster
(rev. 201906080832)

Enough

In nomine...

I. Intro

One of the stories I like to tell about my family is about when we moved out of the Bronx. Becky and I lived there five years, and our children were born there. When we moved away, Eli was still a baby and Aviva was about three years old. We had been working as church planters in the Bronx, but our sponsoring church was in Birmingham, Alabama. So upon leaving the Bronx, we went to spend several weeks in Birmingham, reporting back and saying thank you to this church that had loved us and cared for us for the past six years.

The morning after we arrived in Birmingham, we were concerned to soften the blow for our children, whose world was being turned upside down. So we decided to do something familiar, a favorite family activity: we would go to the library. We knew from previous visits that the local public library was new and kid-friendly and super nice. So we told Aviva and Eli that's what we were doing. Eli wasn't old enough to grasp what we were saying, but Aviva was excited.

At least, she was excited for a few minutes. As we started to bundle the kids into the car, Aviva started wailing. I'll grant you, the last couple days had involved long car trips, but this was just going to be a ten minute jaunt to the library. Aviva was seriously upset. After some consoling and calming, we asked her what was wrong. She managed to choke out that she wanted to *walk* to the library. Like we always did back home in the Bronx. Most of our time in New York we didn't even own a car. Now Aviva was being initiated into a new life where we were going to have to drive *everywhere*.

There were lots of things we loved about the Bronx. The food, the mix of cultures, our work. Even when relationships were challenging with our co-workers, we loved them. But there were countless little things we loved without even realizing it. Things we didn't see, didn't notice, but loved all the more because of it. Walking out our door and a couple blocks over to the library was one of those things. While Becky & I appreciated the new luxury of an air-conditioned car to take us where we wanted to go, Aviva knew that that luxury came with loss.

II. Thesis

In our Gospel account today, Phillip makes a request of Jesus that sounds like something we might ask today: "Lord Jesus, just... show us the father. That will be enough for us."

Jesus' response to Phillip is a little disconcerting. Because on the one hand, Phillip is asking for the right thing! The whole point of Jesus' life, Jesus' mission, is to make God known to humankind. Here at the end, in a conversation John places in the context of Jesus' last meal with the disciples, Phillip is finally grasping the point of Jesus' ministry. "Lord, show us the father, and that will suffice for us."

On the other hand, Jesus is a little sharp with Phillip because he hasn't taken his understanding of Jesus' mission far enough. He says, "How long have I been with you, and you still don't know me, Phillip? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you ask me that, 'Show us the Father?'"

Jesus is a little exasperated. Here it is, the night before he will die in order to fulfill his mission, and his disciples *still* don't get it!

Jesus goes on to explain:

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?
What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord:
it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works."

To know Jesus is, in fact, to know God. To hear Jesus speaking is to hear God speaking. To see the works, the signs and miracles and every-day activities of Jesus is to see God at work.

III. Good News

What Jesus seems to be suggesting is that God has always been present with God's people. But we were a little slow to understand that reality, so God put on flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus. And while Jesus walked among us we could point to him and say, "Look! Immanuel! God-with-us!" But God's intention was and is to be closer to us than some celebrity we can point at on television and say, "Isn't he great?!" So Jesus hung around in bodily form long enough to get his message across, and then left. But he left with the promise that God would remain present to us, closer than ever.

The word Jesus used to describe this closer presence of God, closer even than a friendly neighbor, closer than a brother or sister, was the Greek word "paraclete." The word *paraclete* can mean all kinds of things. It's often translated comforter, advocate, teacher, encourager, or guide.

At the Feast of Pentecost, which we celebrate today, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, the *paraclete*, to dwell with God's people. In Baptism, that *paraclete* came to dwell with each of us in a new and intimate way, to encourage and inform, to guide and to comfort, to teach and to advocate on our behalf before God.

IV. Invitation

God has always been at work in the world, among people. But like someone who can walk to the library but wishes they had a car, we were mostly blind to God's presence and intimate involvement in our life. God lived among us with the goal of helping us to understand God's love for us and to become ready to receive and respond to God's even more intimate presence as the *paraclete*, the Holy Spirit.

What Aviva taught me in her tearful lament that she wanted to walk to the library, is how many little things I take for granted. She reminded me to notice God's presence and God's goodness, yes in the big exciting things: a successful surgery, a new job, a graduation. But even more to notice God's presence, God's Holy Spirit at work, in the little things: that I woke up this morning; my ability to move and care for myself; the relationships I enjoy with family and friends; each time I am given the grace to say a kind or encouraging word to someone. These, too, are all manifestations of God's Holy Spirit at work.

The Holy Spirit is like the wind, the air we breathe. Sometimes we forget to even notice. The Feast of Pentecost, which we celebrate today, is a day we take to stop and remember that God is present to us in the words and actions of God's community, and in the *paraclete* that dwells in each of us to encourage and to guide.

Today we finish our cycle of major Holy Days around the life of Christ. In the coming season after Pentecost, we are called to *be* the body of Christ, continuing God's mission of presence, love and reconciliation. Being the body of Christ doesn't require heroic efforts and amazing feats of piety. It just means being open and attentive and aware of the Holy Spirit at work within and around us, noticing and acknowledging God's goodness in our lives and sharing that goodness with others.

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