

“Participating in the mystery of Love” a sermon preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin on 21 May 2017. The texts were John 14:15-21 and Acts 17:22-31

There is something about being together when it is very cold.

Yesterday at the market, people talked with each other in the context of snowing.

It was the friendliness of the faithful.

Friendliness ..

The relational nature of our faith is very evident in the gospel today.

If you love me ... says Jesus.

The Spirit of truth abides with you and he will be in you.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.

Those who love me will be loved by my Father.

I will not leave you orphaned.

This is faith that is intimate, personal, familial.

St Ignatius spoke of the Lover and the Loved, the Father and the Son.

We participate in the love that flows between them. This is love for the sake of the other, a Jesus love. It is not self-absorbed or needy or manipulative. We enter into that love in the Spirit of God. We participate in the pure love that flows in god's own being. How easy to forget. How good to remember.

To see Jesus looking on us, from the cross that unveils God's heart of pure flowing love. When we are afraid, to see Jesus looking on us. When we feel alone, to see Jesus looking on us.

When we feel angry or sad or upset, to see Jesus looking on us. When we feel ignored or undervalued, to see Jesus looking on us. In pure love, from the cross.

To know that we abide in the heart of Love itself, Love with a capital L, Love we name God. Our faith takes us into our experience of being parented by God. Being parented can be the most intense of human experiences, both good and bad intense.

When I was a child I needed a small operation. We drove to Auckland to a hospital in Grafton Road. My parents took me up to a room and I met a nurse. They said they were just going outside for a moment. A little later I looked out the window of my room and

saw them get in their car and drive off. The betrayal was so intense because it was so unusual. I don't think I had been left like that before.

Craig Barnes is the President of Princeton Seminary in New Jersey, USA.

His father was a pastor who left his family when Craig was sixteen. His family never heard from him again. The year after his father left, Craig and his brother tried to hitchhike some distance to visit their mother for Christmas. Hours pass, it begins to snow and get dark, and they are standing beside the road reciting Bible verses to each other—verses, he says, which their father had made them memorize as children. Proverbs 3:5. Romans 8:28. Jeremiah 29:11. And for the first time he heard them. He writes:

“I was confused, frightened and grieving over the loss of everything that once held my world together. I needed a saviour.... This is the great advantage of abandonment—it makes it easier to hear God's words of love and purpose for us.... I thought I had captured God like a canary in my hand. But when I opened my hand, all I found was a Bible reference. Now I had to believe. I had to believe not in what I knew about God, because that was just information. Now I had to believe that God knew me. I had to believe that I was precious, honoured and loved.... I began that evening as a lost teenager on the side of the road. After hearing the word of the Lord to me, I knew my life had been lost for a purpose.... Nothing is ever wasted when God converts us.”

“The deep fear behind every loss is that we have been abandoned by the God who should have saved us. The transforming moment in Christian conversion comes when we realize that even God has left us. We then discover it was not God, but our image of God that abandoned us. This frees us to discover more of the mystery of God than we knew. Only then is change possible.”

Jesus had spoken of the death ahead of him, of going away. And he says to his disciples – “I will not leave you orphaned.”

We know this love in ordinary human experience. When people care for us in times of need; When a person delights in us; When a child trusts us; When someone listens to us.

Jesus uses the image of advocate, of one who speaks up for us, stands up for us, defends us. Few experiences hearten us more

Isn't the hardest part believing love? Learning to trust the love of the other. We learn as they act consistently, faithfully. That was the promise of Jesus.

Barbara Brown Taylor described the Holy Spirit this way:

When Jesus let go of his last breath willing, we believe, for love of us, that breath hovered in the air in front of him for a moment and then it was set loose on earth. It was such a pungent breath so full of passion, so full of life that it did not simply dissipate as so many breaths do. It grew, in strength and in volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning through an upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. God wanted to make sure that Jesus friends were the inheritors of Jesus breath, and it worked.

This consistent action is obedience. Not obedience demanded or imposed. Obedience that comes from love of the other, for the sake of the other, over time. Obedience is love with devotion. Much more than emotion, more than feelings. To give totally, completely – as a practised discipline.

Obedience to Christ's words leads to a life which not only serves Christ, but is filled with Christ. For in our decisions to welcome and be obedient, the go-between God enters our life, takes residence, becomes the One who makes obedience desirable and possible.

God in you: through the Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ enters us, fills us, uses us, and leads us to a life that none of us could have otherwise chosen or found, life now that has a trajectory leading to eternity, and beyond.

Andrew King -

AND WE IN YOU

(John 14: 15-21)

As the tree is in the earth
and the earth in the tree,
as the sea is in the fish
and the fish in the sea,

as the bird is in the air
and the air in the bird,
as word is in the breath
and breath in the word,

as rhyme is in the music
and music in rhyme,
as time is in the season
and the season in time,

as grief is in the loving
and loving in grief,
as belief is in the hope
and hope in the belief,

as desire is in the will
and the will in desire,
as fire is in the flame
and the flame in the fire,

as you, Christ, are in God
and God is in you,
so are you in us,
and we in you.

So are you in us and
we in you.

Thanks be to God.

Prayer

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