

Easter 6B- May 17, 2009
Church of the Holy Spirit, Vashon Island
Acts 10:44-48, Psalm 98
I John 5:1-6, John 15:9-17

Most Holy God, you choose us to be your companions along the way, help us be present to your presence. Amen.

It is obvious from the moment you get off the ferry and start up the hill towards town, that people on this island love the outdoors. You love the trees, the water, and the view. You love the natural state of things, untouched by modern distractions such as sidewalks or streetlights. When someone visits Vashon for the first time, it is immediately clear that you love this land and you love the water around it.

When I arrived at the end of last summer, I was overwhelmed with hospitality, welcome, and the literal fruits of your labor. As I pedaled home, back to west Seattle, each day, Joel would greet me at the door eager to see what homemade jams, pickles, or produce I pulled out of my backpack. In fact, we just finished up our last jar of jam last week and had to buy one from the store. It doesn't taste nearly as good.

If you take some time to bicycle, run, or drive around this island, you start to notice the livestock, the gardens, the incredible time people spend enjoying the beauty of this place. On my running route when we were living on the island, I passed goats, chickens, lots of barking dogs, horses, and a few llamas in a few short miles. On more than a few occasions, I also saw raccoons, deer, and even wild turkeys. This is a place pulsing with the wildness of God's creation.

This community really cares about the environment and that is clear from the way you interact with it and how you work to celebrate and preserve it. This morning, we (will get/had) the opportunity to hear from Jim McRae and Julia Lakey about an exciting new project Holy Spirit is part of in the diocese. The Bishop's Committee on the Environment has chosen Holy Spirit to be one of five pilot parishes in a new initiative to

“green” our congregations, to reduce our carbon footprint, and to help us be better stewards of God’s creation.

And there is no better Sunday to announce this than today, rogation Sunday. Rogation days originated in the late 5th century and were introduced by Bishop Mamertus of Vienne. There are traditionally three rogation days in the week leading up to the feast of the Ascension, which is next Sunday. So, this Sunday is a day for marking this occasion.

Rogation Sunday is a time to ask God’s blessing on the fields, gardens, orchards, and seeds, all things used in food production this season. I ran into the associate priest from St. Stephen’s in Longview last weekend and she said they are really celebrating this year. This morning at St. Stephen’s all of the parishioners are bringing their garden tools to church to be blessed. And they are also blessing a vegetable garden on the church grounds, a community garden open to anyone.

What a wonderful way to celebrate our responsibility to be good stewards of God’s creation! Today’s gospel lesson is a continuation of last week’s reading. It builds on the idea of our abiding/dwelling in God and God in us. This week, the focus is on abiding in God’s love. God wants us to dwell, tarry, loiter, and linger in the awesome presence of God’s love.

Okay, so that sounds nice, dwelling in God’s love, but what does it really mean? **How** does one do that? Abiding in God’s love means being truly present to God. Like I said last week, it means giving God our very selves, our souls, and bodies. But, still, **how** do we do this? There is a certain mystery that shouldn’t try to be explained, a mysterious thin space in the world where suddenly we feel projected out of our daily existence into a place of centeredness and being with God.

For me, this feeling has always come when I am surrounded by nature. When I am outside in the midst of God’s creation, I feel closer to God. When do you feel closer to God? While you are vacuuming? Gardening? Sailing? Walking the dog? Cooking for your family?

The richness of this gospel text is too much to absorb all at once. It includes the great commandment to “love one another as I have loved you.” It teaches us that God **chooses us**. God chooses us not to be servants, but to be friends. In this gospel text, Jesus doesn’t want slaves in this world. Jesus wants companions. The whole concept of friendship in biblical times meant something different. The friendship between Jesus and the disciples was a relationship so deep that they were willing to give their lives for one another...and Jesus did give his life for all of us.

Soren Kierkegaard said, “Christianity is not a doctrine to be taught, but a life to be lived.” And so it is, our faith compels us and calls us to love one another, to care for creation, and to live out our baptismal covenant in our actions.

I came across an image this past week in meditation on this gospel text that said, “we are not hosts at God’s table—we are all guests.” It reminds me of something my priest used to say when I was in college. He would pause at the offertory each week and he would say, “we know that this house does not belong to us, but belongs to God. And likewise, this table does not belong to us because it is God’s table. And at the time of communion, all are welcome at this table, if you are hungry, you may eat.”

How is that for radical hospitality? None of this is ours, not this table, not this building, not this island, or this planet. It all belongs to God and it is our job to care for it, nurture, and protect it. We are not supposed to complacently believe in the resurrection, more importantly we are commanded to “practice the resurrection!” And we practice the resurrection by loving one another in the same way that God loves us. God chooses us to be God’s companions in this resurrection!