

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
May 21, 2017
John 17:1-11

Today is the 35th anniversary of my marriage to Jim. From this vantage point I can look back with ease and tell the story of how we met, our interesting courtship, the day we got married (well, the 2 different days), the business we ran together for 15 years, the birth of our two sons, and the ups and downs of our life together. There are definite facts: the dates we were married, how many children we had together, the different homes and towns where we have lived, the deaths of our parents, the pets we've owned, and other such details. And then there are the memories of vacations, job interviews and job losses, anniversaries and conflicts, and financial challenges. These stories are told differently depending on which of us tells them and what mood we're in.

But if I could step back into the shoes of my former self when I was walking alone along the lake shore in Chicago where I had come to visit Jim, agonizing over whether this was the guy I wanted to spend my life with, I wouldn't have a relatively straight forward story to tell you. I was trying to look ahead into the future. And I was longing to talk to someone; someone who could hear my fears and hopes and then tell me what I should do. And of course, there was no one to do that for me. I had to search my own heart and make my own decision and take the next step in opening my heart to this man who intrigued and delighted me.... or not! I gave into fear and decided it was easier to be safe than to risk stepping into the unknown. I went

back to the apartment where Jim was waiting for me and blurted out, “I can’t do it. This isn’t going to work. We need to break it off.” And felt enormous relief that I had finally made a decision..... until Jim said, “You can’t just unilaterally make a decision about our relationship! We’re too far in for you to do that on your own!” I knew he was right, and so we sat and talked and I realized he was the one I could talk to about my fears and hopes. And the rest is history, as they say.

For some folks, the moment they become a Christian is the moment they declare, “I accept Jesus as my Lord and saviour.” And it’s a done deal.

For me, my journey into the church and into being baptized and becoming a Christian was, is and I imagine, will be an ongoing process.

In today’s reading from the Gospel of John we hear more of Jesus’ farewell discourse to his disciples. His life on earth is about to come an end and he is teaching and reassuring them. They can’t see into the future. “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

For John, the whole reason people were created is for relationship with their Creator, God. And he says that eternal life springs out of this relationship; in our deepening knowing God and the Son he sent. That in sharing our hopes and fears we open to the Source of all love and intensifying intimacy is created. And in this intimacy of relationship, we enter into eternal life that starts here on earth. We move from glory on earth to glory in heaven – we are part of this movement.

Jesus glorified God – he honoured and revealed God’s power and love - through the divine power he expressed in the miracles and wonders he performed. And then he ultimately revealed God’s glory in the Divine love expressed through the crucifixion of God’s son - the ultimate sacrifice. This is the work Jesus came to finish, or complete.

It can be a bit confusing to read this passage. Jesus speaks about himself in the third person and the tenses are not consistent. So we need to look at what Jesus is talking about. He is speaking as the future has already happened, and he is referring to himself as existing before the creation of the world. In this way we get a glimpse of God and Jesus’ eternal nature and that in getting to know them, we too enter into a different kind of time. Our relationship with God, and with Jesus who lived and at the same time existed before time, takes us into another realm – eternal life.

So if what John is suggesting in this passage is true, that relationship with God transcends time and space, and that all we need to enter this loving and limitless relationship has been given to us, and that Jesus’ work and death here on earth has set us free, the good news is also the scary bit. There is no reason to wait, there is nothing we need to wait for, everything we need is here. So we are being called to “proceed as if we are needed,” and go out into the world glorifying – or revealing and sharing the power of God’s love through our experience of a deepening relationship with the One who created us to be in relationship with God.

That can be a overwhelming idea. We may want to decide on our own if we want to proceed; if this is the road we want to take.

My thought is that it's too late to pull out. Of course, we can make up our minds and say, "I don't think so. This is not for me. I'm not comfortable with this; I like my life as it is." And we can fool ourselves.

But if we've been coming to church and receiving communion, and if we've been studying scripture, and if we've been sitting quietly or walking meditatively, we've allowed God to get close. And a relationship with God is a powerful thing. It changes you. Just as any relationship does. Suddenly you find your life is interconnected with God's and you're not making decisions on your own. An interesting question might be – why am I here at church today? Whose idea was it? We're drawn to be with the one we love. We are moved by the love we share to do things we would not necessarily do on our own.

So, would it be possible to say – "Today I'm celebrating so many years of my relationship with God? And these are the signposts along the way. These were the highlights; these were the difficult moments. This was the time I was angry and felt so alone."

Our relationship with God is ongoing. It changes. We change. We ignore, we acknowledge. We engage and we push away. And for better or for worse, we bump along, or rest peacefully.

On earth as it is in heaven. Jesus gave us the truth and revealed to us the love of God. To the extent that we believe and we engage, we are entering more or less fully into the eternal that is ours by birthright.

Intense, mystical stuff from John. Yet imminently hopeful and profoundly moving.

Our God loves us and invites us into a relationship that cannot fail.

Thanks be to God. Hallelujah!