

Sermon May 26, 2019 John 14:23-29
Enabling Us to Be Who We Are

I have to admit that today's Gospel lesson is one of the most complex set of words put together in Scripture for me. In Deacon School we were taught and encouraged to be able to summarize our sermon in one clarifying sentence. In the spirit of those lessons, I defy anyone to sit down, read the gospel for today, and summarize it in even a few clean sentences. It was not possible for me, at first. You see, the words weave in and out, around and through, twisting and turning, because the author, John, writes in this circular style. In my novice attempt to unweave all the strands, I relied on some Theological work done by one of our Province One Theology Instructors Fredrica Harris Thompsett, and her book "We are Theologians", the words are mine, but the methodology is hers. I offer three threads that emerge to me from this tapestry of words. The first is that God is called Father, it implies relationship, a closeness and familiarity with us, to a powerful presence much greater than we are, much like that of a parent to a small child. Secondly, that God the Father comes to live in us and we live in God. That is to say the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God the Father, comes to live in us and we live in the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, as a consequence of our belief in God, and the Holy Spirit living in us, there is a harmony and peace created within each of us. It is a part of defining who we are. If we choose to live this life of peace, we become people of peace.

If you are not yawning yet then I still have a chance, I started this sermon this way because I felt it important to understand the depth and richness of this Gospel and how I intend to use it to explore our individual selves, what makes us who we are and how we act. Yes, how we conduct ourselves on a daily basis but more importantly that we understand that the way act, live and interact with others; family , friends and strangers at any moment can impact or influence them positively or negatively as to whom they are or become and consequently choose how they act and conduct themselves. This isn't a new concept by any means, but it is one worth repeating and to keep in front of us constantly as a reminder, especially here at St. A's because of our interaction with so many young people still forming and defining themselves.

I have this strange sensation that overcomes me occasionally, more observation and realization really. Perhaps you have had similar experience. Sometimes when I read a newspaper, type on the computer or even while just washing my hands, my fingers move in such a way that they remind me of my father's hands. They are no longer my hands but my father's hands. Because my father's hands were identical to mine from the hair on my hands, the fingernails, the shape and size and strength. It occurred to me that even as he got older, his body failing him, his hands never changed. I swear even the day he died as he gripped my hand, bear paw to bear paw, this carpenter could have still held a claw hammer. My Father is in me, but I am not my Father. My father lives inside of me. I have his mannerisms. I have his attitudes, his opinions, his feelings. Very simply, my father, John Izzi lives in Robert Izzi. If you knew my father, you would know me. If you know me, you know a lot about my father. I won't ask for a show of hands and I am not excluding Mothers and daughters but I am assuming there is a large percentage of people in this sanctuary who share a similar realization.

How did this come to be? Why am I so much like my father? I don't exactly know. I know I have his genes and chromosomes. We spent a great deal of time working on the farm together and building houses as I was growing up. We spent a lot of time walking and talking and working together. Just by being together in all these circumstances, he transmitted his qualities to me. He didn't try. It just happened.

When Jesus says, "My father lives in me," I understand that. I understand it perfectly well because "my old man" John Izzi lives in me, Robert Izzi. I understand all that is God the Father lives in his Son. The Father's gentle love, the Father's patient forgiveness, the Father's compassion for every one around him. All these qualities that Jesus had in him, these are the same qualities that Jesus got from his "old man." I write this way because that is the way I speak to God, it is open and intimate, there is a closeness that I feel and comfort level that one experiences with someone when you know and trust them in your lives. We come here on Sunday to share Worship in community but this does define our own unique relationship with God.

Well, how does this come to be? How do these divine qualities get into our lives? By walking with God, by talking with God, by working with God, by being around God, by hanging out with God. These qualities then gradually seep into our lives. And we can understand that. The father lives in the son. The mother lives in the daughter. The father lives in the daughter. The mother lives in the son. We can understand that because people closest to us live in us. Their love, their compassion, their mannerisms, their values, their beliefs: they seep into our lives and we don't even know it is happening. I understand what it means that my father lives in me and I live in my father. I hope you too can understand that because chances are, your mom and/or dad live in you. You are keenly aware of your mom and dad living in you, and you live in them as well. You see yourself in each other.

This manifests itself in our lives because all act out of who we are inside. Somewhere in the deep places of our spirit we have an opinion or a notion of who we are. We all act out of that inner reality. No matter how we try to conceal this side of ourselves, who we are will ultimately show itself.

Who we are is often internalized because of other people's influences in our lives--whether for good or bad. As Christians, who we are should be shaped by our efforts to keep the word of Jesus, and by our willingness to accept God through the Holy Spirit living in us. Jesus tells his disciples that those who love him will keep his word. He goes on to let them know that God will send the Holy Spirit in his name; the Holy Spirit will be a teacher.

There is an overriding public sentiment in our contemporary culture for individuality. On every front; Internet, YouTube, Instagram, TV shows, talk shows, newspaper columnists, advertising--there is this push for "being who you are", a person who should always be concerned about your individual right to do what you want to do and be who you want to be. That is all well and good. Unfortunately, a lot of this thrust does not take into consideration that you must live in relationship with others. Therefore, it is necessary that you must give consideration to the rights of others to be who they are as well as who you are. I find this a common theme on this campus. There is work to be done here, I see it with my players. We can't live in isolation, we certainly don't here at St.A's. We have to consider the well-being of others as well as ourselves. The pressures of today to perform, excel and sustain takes over the inherent want or need to be selfless, caring, peaceful and faithful.

The way out of this quagmire for people of faith is to understand that who we are will be developed and become evident as we do as Jesus said--love him enough to keep his word. Accept the teachings of God's Spirit that are given to us. God's Spirit can and will teach us in all areas of our lives. We can be who we are--who God wants us to be--as we live by the word of Jesus, as we depend upon the presence of God's Spirit within us and share in this community.

It is true that each of us wants to express who we are. That is the way God has created us as people. But as people of faith, our responsibility is to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's ministry to us, to be sensitive to the Spirit's presence so that we could be who we are in continuing the ministry of Jesus upon the earth. Jesus was challenging his disciples to such a responsibility. He was not going to be with them in the physical body soon, but the Holy Spirit was going to be sent to help them continue in ministry. He wanted them to be sensitive to God's Spirit and not to be fearful as they went out to continue to do ministry. The Holy Spirit would be there as a source of help for them.

And so it is with God's Spirit, it seeps into our lives and we don't even know it is happening. Why? It's because we hang out together; we walk together; we talk together; we work together. We are God's spirit working in each of us for each of us. When the Holy Spirit comes to live in us, it is God's love that comes and lives in us. The example of the love of Christ comes and lives in us and through us. That is Christ's commandment to us: that we are a loving people; and the love of Christ is to live in us. Jesus came and taught us and showed us how to be God's instrument in the world in the community where we find ourselves. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to enable us to be all that God wants us to be. I invite and encourage you to open yourself up to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I spoke in the beginning of this sermon about that clarifying sentence that can be drawn from a sermon to express the meaning or intent with in it. As I approach my one year anniversary of my ordination, I am cognitive of the message I am attempting to share and hopefully sharing with richness and depth. God is called Father with all the intimacy that the word Father brings. God, the Holy Spirit, comes and lives in us and us in God; and by living our lives as our true authentic self, we then become peaceful people.

AMEN