

Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year A – May 10, 2020 – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony

Acts 7:55-60, Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, 1 Peter 2:2-10, John 14:1-14

If you are viewing this video on Sunday, you probably know that today is Mother's Day. Like so many of the recent milestones of our lives, this Mother's Day is unlike any you have ever experienced before. On Mother's Day I am always aware of the people for whom this for whatever reason is a painful day. So, to begin, I want to pause for a moment in acknowledgement that for some this is not a Hallmark moment. Recognizing the pain for some that this day brings, is not intended to take away from the joy and meaning that motherhood can bring to one's life.

I am not and never have been a mother in the narrow sense of the word. I am blessed with nieces, nephews, great nieces, great nephews, step children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren. And in my younger days, I had many friends who were willing to share their children with me. I have been blessed by this generosity.

What I have learned as the years have passed is that the connection I had with these young people was less about biology and more about opportunity. And those connections have changed with time. They have been over the years in transition. Not too long ago I overheard my 36-year-old nephew telling his 6-year-old sons that he used to "hang out with Auntie Joanie and it was pretty cool." I'm not sure I ever thought I was "hanging out" I thought I was babysitting. Our relationship has changed from that 6-year-old who I allowed to have two scoops of ice cream when his parents would have only allowed one, to the 36-year-old who has memories that are "cool". All this time that we have been in transition, and our connection has been transformed. I expect the process of transition and transformation will continue to go on as we both age.

I tell you this as a prelude to saying that I really do think this is part of what Jesus was trying to tell his disciples as he was saying goodbye to them before the crucifixion. This is the story of transition and transformation. Truth be told we are always living in a cycle of transition and transformation. From the time that we are born to the time that we die, life is the movement from one place to another.

This particular portion of gospel is often used at memorial services because it speaks specifically to eternal and everlasting life. The image of a place prepared for us by Jesus is one of consolation for those who are grieving the death of someone they love. But for us who still dwell on earth, eternal life, everlasting life can and does mean more than what happens when we die. It has meaning for what we are about as we live. This was a lesson that the disciples learned as they followed Jesus first in body and ultimately in spirit.

The men who became the disciples were simple, observant Jews, living in occupied Palestine. They were much like us, focused on family and work. They were waiting for the messiah that the prophets told them would come to redeem Israel. Like all human beings, they approached God in their particular context, a context of waiting for God to act, to send the promised shepherd, the hoped for king, the anointed one. And when God sent Jesus, and they nearly didn't recognize him. He wasn't what they had expected and they didn't understand. That was the starting point of a journey of recognition and transformation.

For three years they followed Jesus, listened to him teach, watched him heal, and their faith grew. It was a faith in transition about to be transformed. It was a faith seeking

understanding. The three years passed in fellowship, in tension, in conflict with authorities. Three years of moving about Palestine brought them to this room in Jerusalem on the eve of Passover, brought them to this place to hear their Messiah tell them what coming next. It brought them to the place where they could see what Jesus was calling them to become.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled”. My first thought on hearing this is to think a bit irreverently, “easy for you to say.” Jesus did not leave it there with seemingly empty words of reassurance. Jesus promised them a place with him always. And, while they did not understand, while they had questions and anxiety about the future, they believed Jesus’ promise of a place with him always. They believed Jesus’ promise because he had never failed them, never promised what he did not fulfill. On that night, the disciples heard comfortable words, words that seemed to secure their future. Little did they know on that night that eternal life was not only future but began in that moment and would be a part of their lives forever.

The disciples were on the brink of transformation, growing from Jews waiting for the Messiah to men who had found him. They were on the edge of becoming what the world now knows them to be. Peter, James, John, Andrew and all the rest became the instruments through which God the Holy Spirit changed the world.

Their lives became very different. No longer, fishermen, tax collectors or a physician, they became evangelists and just as Jesus had asked they went out from Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth bringing the news of what God had done. In the words of the Gospel of Mark: “They went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them...” The place that Jesus had prepared for those disciples was in the world, telling the good news. And, as he had promised, he was with them.

Some years ago, there was a popular metaphor called the butterfly effect. You may remember it. In [chaos theory](#), the butterfly effect is ... sensitive dependence... in which a small change ...can result in large differences ...” at a later date. It was popularized by the work of Edward Lorenz in the area of weather and climate. The metaphor went something like this. When a butterfly flaps it’s wings in India the impact is felt in Indiana.

To me this the idea of small individual actions leading to large change fits well with the idea of how through small movements significant change can occur. The sum total of many individual transitional events leads to transformation. This is true for us personally and also true for us as a community of faith. St. Augustine’s in the Woods is part of the butterfly effect. Those seemingly small changes that we might make can and will have a large impact on our surroundings and on our future. We must choose well.

We have been apart as a community of faith for some time. It has been hard, we long to see each other, to talk together, to greet one another in peace and to share the Eucharistic bread and wine. We will do that again, but when we come together we will have changed. Perhaps the change will be small, lessons learned while we stayed at home, modifications in the way we do things. We may be washing our hands more often, going to the grocery store less frequently and those may be changes we want to keep. We may have also made changes in the way we think, the way we pray, we may have come to new insights about our life and the lives of those around us. The sum total of changes in our thoughts, our prayers and our insights can be a larger transformation for who we are, going forward into the future. What will we bring with us into the Nave on that first time of being back? What will we have left behind? What is

new that we have to share concerning what has happened to us? What are we willing and able to hear from those who are beside us?

Just like those early disciples, Peter, James, John, Andrew, and yes, Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalen and all the rest, we are different just simply by the experiences of the last several weeks. We have a rather unique opportunity to consider what this new way of being might look like. We have a singular chance to see clearly the transformation that is possible and to act to secure it. Acting to secure it will mean letting go and taking on. Letting go of what might have held us back as a community and taking on that which we see as our newly transformed selves. And then of course, we will begin again from that point into new transitions, new ways of changing and growing. This is eternal life. To change and grow is everlasting life as Jesus envisioned it and offered it to the disciples and to us. Eternal life here and now until that time when each of us is transformed into a spiritual body that dwells with God in that place prepared for us in heaven. Until that time, the place prepared for us is here, our eternal life is at hand. Choose well how we live in this place prepared for us.