

Sunday, May 13, 2018

7th Sunday of Easter

The Holy Gospel according to John... Glory to you O Lord

GOSPEL	<i>John 17:6–19</i>
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In this reading the church hears Jesus' words on the night before his death. This gospel reports the words of Jesus' prayer, a prayer for his disciples and for all who would believe in him through their words.

⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

FIRST READING	<i>Acts 1:15–17, 21–26</i>
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¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, ¹⁶Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus — ¹⁷for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." ²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." ²³So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

The whole story. When was the last time we knew the whole story to something? My guess is it is rarer than we think. Even if we are the ones central in the story, even if we are telling about something that happened in our lives, we may often know with great accuracy how we saw something, interpreted something, and reacted – but if there are others involved, we do not necessarily know their full story. Thus, sometimes, I think the whole story can be a very fleeting thing. This is often why when something historical happens on this earth, there are several stories, books and movies written, because each time, when things are betrayed honestly and factually, we still learn more about the story. Just a few nights ago I finished watching the Ken Burns movie on the Roosevelts. It was fascinating to learn new aspects of history from the lives of Theodore, Eleanor, and Franklin. It concluded with aspects about the second world war. I also watched the movie, the Darkest Hour, which was about Winston Churchill, particularly about his handling of the issues around the second world war as well. And once again, I learned more to the story about that war. I am certain there is far more information around that subject that I have yet to know.

The same is true when it comes to understanding the Scriptures and particularly the story of Jesus. Because this history took place many centuries ago, because the written accounts, while numerous as compared to other historical events, did not have the advantage of things easily written or recorded, there are so many stories and events that we only have small clues about, that we wish we knew more. For example, when we picture the ministry of Jesus, we often picture this great rabbi, walking along the countryside with twelve men following him. While we do know some things about these men, if we just have this picture concerning the

following of Jesus, we are only getting a part of it. In various places in the Scriptures there is reference to women following along as well. We know some of them Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, to name a few. We do not know if they were with him all the time or part of it. However, the group that was with Jesus doesn't stop there either. There were other men, who were disciples of Jesus who followed him from the very beginning of events. How do we know this - one reference is in our first lesson this morning?

As has been mentioned before, throughout the church's celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord, we do not read from the Old Testament as usual, instead we switch to the book the Acts of the Apostles. It is this one book that gives us a telling of the earliest movements of the apostles in the aftermath of the empty tomb. This unique book gives insights into the formation of the church. In today's reading we hear how the believers in the Easter event had now grown to about one hundred and twenty. It is the now emboldened leader Peter, who proclaims that is important that the inner circle of twelve be restored back to that number again, to fill the vacancy created by Judas' death. Not only is it interesting that they felt this had to be done for their mission, it can be surprising what the criteria was in order to be qualified to fill the position. Verse 21 reads: "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." The criteria meant that it had to be someone who was there at the beginning. So here we have a reference that there were other men who had been through everything with Jesus, along with the twelve. We might wonder just how many others there were. The answer is we do

not know, but apparently it was a considerable group, because we are told in the very next verse that they whittled the list down to two, so there were like at least a handful of others who had followed Jesus from his baptism all the way through to the ascension. Again, we often just picture the twelve. It turns out there were at least several others. The two that it is narrowed down to are named. Verse 22 read: “So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.” In looking at these two men, the account goes on to say that Matthias is elected. The one who was not chosen was Joseph of Barsabbas.

So, Joseph of Barsabbas, was there following Jesus right from the beginning; right from the baptism of Jesus up to his death and resurrection, and we know so little about him. The only other potential reference to him is that his brother, Judas of Barsabbas, not to be confused with Judas Iscariot, is also mentioned as a follower of Jesus later in the book of Acts. Besides the brother reference, there is some interpretation of his last name Barsabbas. Some say it means, “Son of an oath,” however, some say it means “Son of an old man,” which obviously means I’m glad Karen didn’t think of this reference when we were trying to come up with a name for our son Theo. There is some outside the Bible reference that Justus, as he is also called, later became a Bishop of the town of Eleutheropolis, which means city of the free. But the bottom line is that for both of these disciples, though they are named here in the Bible, are never referred to again, and not only that, they were chosen from among others who also were with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry, but we just do not know their whole stories. The reality is that they are hidden disciples. Their commitment to the Messiah, their challenges, their accomplishments, probably impacted many other people, but unless some major

archeological discovery is made, we will likely never know their stories of faith. Their devotion to God, their faithful acts will likely remain hidden to us.

I would also venture to say that even today, in 2018, even with all the technology that exists, a large portion of Christian discipleship goes unnoticed by most. And this is okay – we do not do works of discipleship with an expectation that we will get noticed by the neon lights. We do not do them for the primary purpose of being seen by others either. Now I'm not saying or indicating that we should take our Christian light and put it under a bushel so that it is hidden and no one sees it shine; but rather there is definitely a part of the community aspect of our faith that often goes unnoticed, not by God, but by others. Even in a community of faith such as CRLC, there is so much hidden discipleship that occurs in this place. We are concluding the season of Easter today. Easter is the highest holy day that we worship as Christians, and it is led up to by our observance of Lent and Holy Week. There is no way that the services could occur if it was just one or two people putting them together. There is so much that goes on that is hidden from most of us who come and receive the means of grace on a week to week basis; receiving the sacraments and hearing the Word of God. There are so many areas that are crucial to not only a facility operating, not only people performing their jobs and vocations, but the importance of the discipleship of the people in this place can probably never be overestimated. It is our call. It is our faithful vocation. And living out our faith does not mean that we give service only within the confines of these walls. We are hopefully worshiping and equipping ourselves in the faith to live it out in various ways of our daily lives; much of which probably goes unnoticed, much of which we never even see the clear results, much

of which is not known by many other people, but is still Spirit lead and crucial in a living out of the reign of God. It remains hidden but important. Today, we celebrate Mother's Day. One of the things, that is celebrated is that we know in healthy families, much of what a mother does may go unnoticed or even unappreciated, but what we recognize today is those acts are crucial to a family unit.

In the same way, living out our faith does not mean we always get to see the fruits of our labors; we also do not get to see many of the acts of discipleship that are performed by others either. However, what we do - still matters. God has called us in the vineyard, not to have the biggest grapes or the shiniest grapes, but rather we are called to sow seeds of grace, we are called to witness to the freeing words of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May we continue our works, known and unknown, to point to a life of love, forgiveness and peace in the Reign of God. Amen.