

Epworth Chapel on the Green
May 5, 2013
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Acts 14:8-18
Psalm 67
Revelation 21:22-22:5
John 14:23-31

In the 1928 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*, today is known as Rogation Sunday. The word comes from the Latin *Rogare*, which means “to walk around.” Rogation is an old English festival of planting, because on that day people in English parishes would walk around the boundaries of the fields to bless the ground and the seed, and to pray for God’s blessing on the farmers during the critical time of planting.

Rogation days are not universally observed, but it is certainly appropriate for us to pray for God’s blessing on the farmers of the world, especially during the planting season. And it is certainly appropriate to pray that God will watch over the crops and bring them to fruitful harvest.

By way of a spiritual analogy, it is also appropriate for us to continue to pray for all of those throughout the Church who are sowing Gospel seed, whether it be here in North America or on foreign fields. Let us pray that God will bless his Word wherever and whenever it is being sent out into the world, and that in due season the spiritual harvest will be abundant.

Now, in today's Gospel lesson, Jesus continues to teach about love. Love is the foundation of what binds him to the Father and to his disciples. And love is also what produces obedience. Jesus notes: "Those who love me will obey my commandments."

When love is demonstrated through obedience, something amazing happens. Jesus says, "My father will love those who obey, and we will come to them and live with them" (v. 23). Other translations render Jesus' words, "we will make our home with them."

The word "home" here is the same word that appears at the beginning of this chapter in John's Gospel, where Jesus encourages his disciples by saying, "let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many "rooms" or "dwelling places" (John 14:1-2).

If we connect these two uses of the word "home," we see that Jesus promises his disciples a "room" or dwelling place with God *in the future*. But he promises them something else. He also promises them that the Father and he will come and make their "home" with the disciples *here and now, in the present*.

Now, let's try to wrap our minds around the magnitude of these promises. The idea of us going to dwell with God at some point in the future sets our hearts ablaze. It makes us want to leap with joy, to shout with praise (or at least it ought to).

If you have trouble with this, pay attention to passages like what we have today from the Revelation. Allow your mind to wander a little, to stray from the things of earth and to wander off to the things of heaven.

Picture, for a moment, a world where there is no crime, no disease, no poverty, no abuse, and no brokenness.

Picture a world where little children do not go to bed hungry at night. A world where hospitals are forced out of business. A world where shelters for battered women are a thing of the past.

Picture a world where violence and bloodshed have given way to *shalom*, the peace of God.

Picture a world where justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. A world where the crooked has been made straight, the valleys have been exalted, and the hills have been brought low.

Picture it, for this is the world toward which we are moving. This is the world toward which history is taking us. Picture it: ***one day we shall go to dwell with God.***

But in the mean time, the world we inhabit is the present world. Imagining a nice future is great, but we live today with aging parents and terminally ill spouses, with economic recession and a terrible job market. We live in a world of stress, whether it be personal, financial, relational, or otherwise. The promise of a great

future is wonderful, but some folks would trade that promised future for just a little bit of peace of mind and tranquility of life *right now* in the present. Is there a word from Jesus for folks like this?

Jesus says, “the Father and I will come to you, and will make our home with you.”

This is wonderful news indeed. But how does it happen? How will Jesus come to dwell with us, especially when he is preparing to ascend to the Father?

The answer: through the Counselor, the Comforter, the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus will send to us.

What a wonderful promise it is that one day we shall go to dwell with God. And we look forward to that day. But in the meantime, we’re still *here*, and it’s hard to live today on promises for tomorrow.

But Jesus hasn’t forgotten that. He won’t leave us alone. He won’t leave us to figure it all out without help. While we’re waiting and preparing to go and dwell with God, God wants to come and dwell with us -- right here, right now. God has made a way for Jesus to be present with us, even in his *absence*.

The Holy Spirit will come along side us, and he will continue to link us to Jesus, to make Jesus known to us, to remind us of what Jesus’ taught us, and to guide us into all truth. As we prepare to go and dwell with Jesus, Jesus promises to dwell *with* us and *in* us through the Holy Spirit.

As we come to the Table this morning, let us give thanks for the promise that a day is coming when we shall go to dwell with Jesus. Let us rejoice and glory in that promise.

And let us also give thanks that while we wait, Jesus continues to dwell with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus may go to the Father, but he is still very much with us. So let us love him, and one another, like there is no tomorrow. Let us allow him to make his home in us, to dwell fully in us, even as we prepare to go and dwell with him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.