



Fourth Sunday of Easter (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
May 12, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Some of you may know that I was away for several days after Holy Week and Easter. I returned to Boston for the first time since leaving there on February 17, 2017. Specifically, I returned for an award ceremony for a dear priest friend of mine who received a peace and justice award at my home Parish, All Saints, Brookline, Massachusetts.

As in most 'homecoming' experiences, there were warm hearts, beautiful smiles and welcomed embraces of hugs. Being with those for whom one cares and loves is intended to be a joyous occasion. I'm happy that it was indeed that, and the warm embrace of old friends was much appreciated.

I use this as an example because I believe that Jesus worked hard to embrace his disciples and to engender loving relationships. I believe today's Gospel may give us some insight.

When we hear this passage from John's Gospel, we hear graphic language about sheep being snatched away and a shepherd who works to guard and protect them. Clearly, that language echoes the beauty of Psalm 23.

We also hear about the religious authorities who, not unlike the followers of Jesus, just didn't seem to 'get' what Jesus tried to teach them. It wasn't an easy message for them. It may not have been such an easy message for this disciples. Is it an easy message for us?

Jesus, who was God, was also a human being. One of the more mysterious aspects of our faith as Christians is that Jesus was both God and human. For me, it is the humanity of Jesus with which I can 'hang my hat' and with which I can identify.

In today's Gospel. Jesus and his encounter with the religious authorities of his day enable us to experience a human side of Jesus. Perhaps, Jesus was frustrated or confused. To those he encountered, he had attempted to reveal himself, to be as transparent as possible. One can read this passage from John with different tones of voice and different inflections. The Jews along with his disciples, just may have wounded Jesus with their on-going lack of recognition.

Can we imagine how Jesus would have recovered from such encounters? How would Jesus have gone about reconciling his attempts to reveal himself while dealing with misunderstandings even disagreements? It would seem that Jesus and those around him were just as human as we are.

St. Mark's is composed of human beings who sometimes experience disagreements. We experience human and difficult times of relating to one another.

Here just as in everyday life, actions, words and conversations can have an impact on individuals and on our life together. Yet, we are reminded that we are to love one another and to work to create a bridge to the future, a bridge with foundations of forgiveness and reconciliation.

In our daily lives, there are circumstances in which we need to create a bridge from the past to the future. How successful we are at that may enable us to grow and to strengthen our relationships with others or not. Is that not the Jesus of the Gospel, Jesus a consummate relationship builder?

Jesus worked to create relationships which enabled others to become people of love, kindness and mercy. If we believe that at the core of Jesus's mission was love, then, are we not called to love as he loved? This question is embedded in the mission of the Christian Tradition and the mission of St. Mark's as well. We are challenged here and elsewhere to Christ's mission of love.

In a recent meeting, I said that if we, as a community of faith, are not a community of forgiveness and reconciliation, then, we should close the doors of the church and walk away. Jesus' mission is our mission, and we are called to make that mission a reality.

Jesus is the model. Jesus modelled forgiveness, reconciliation and love. He loved his disciples. He continued to see in them and sees in us models of forgiveness, reconciliation and love.

In a few minutes, we will pray a unique prayer of blessing for mothers. Some of us experienced loving and caring mothers and others of us did not. Yet, we commemorate motherhood on this day. For some of us, it is a day of great joy, and for the best of maternal love, we give thanks.

In the midst of today's celebration and the complexities of life, we come together inspired by the love of Jesus for his disciples and for us. He loves us without exception and his is the only authentic unconditional love.

Love and freedom are life-giving hallmarks of Easter and the Season of Easter in which we find ourselves. Jesus broke the bonds of death and conquered the darkness of sin forever. Why? Because he loves us!

For all time, Jesus offers the gift of love to all who believe in him. There is freedom in that gift. There is gentleness, compassion and mercy in that gift. Let us embrace that gift, make it our own and go into the world as ambassadors of God's love in Jesus. Amen.