

The Fifth Sunday after Easter (B), Sunday, 29 April 2018
Saint Ignatius of Antioch Episcopal Church

O Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Deuteronomy 4:32-40

Acts 8:26-40

John 14:15-21

In the passage we heard from Deuteronomy this morning, Moses recounts the great deeds that God has done throughout history for Israel. God has chosen this people and spoken to them “out of the midst of the fire,” spoken to Israel (Moses claims) as no other god has spoken to any people. The God of Israel is different from the gods of the Canaanites or the Egyptians or the Greeks, Assyrians, or Persians. This God cares about people for their own sake and not what they can do for God. This God is not selfish or cruel or greedy. This God, we are told, has acted out of love for us.

And yet, the vision of God and God’s love here in Deuteronomy isn’t really all that warm and fuzzy. In fact, it isn’t warm and fuzzy at all. This God saved Israel from bondage in Egypt “by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors.” The sole and divine sovereignty of God was revealed through these deeds and out of the fire and, as a consequence, Israel is disciplined by God. Moses states that all of this God did for us out of love, love shown

by bringing us out of Egypt and “by driving our before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance.”

And because of these great deeds, God demands we keep God’s statutes and commandments. This is the nature of covenant, of relationship with the God of Israel.

There is no sentimentality in this love and I’m not sure how that particular expression of love sits with me. “I’d kill for you,” God is almost saying. Nevertheless we can see what Moses is getting at, something more is going on. We see that God acts to save the people, to teach them the ways of God, and to ask them to follow those commandments, the commandments given on Sinai to love God and neighbour. These are those things that set the God of Israel apart from any other god: the notion that there is a reciprocal relationship, based on action, of deeds done in history for the benefit of the people, of knowledge one of the other, and on love.

In the passage from the part of the Gospel of John known as the farewell discourse that we just heard, Jesus is preparing the disciples for their continued life in community after his death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus knows what is ahead. He knows that having sojourned with them, having performed signs and wonders for them because he loved them, he now must face crucifixion and death in order to reveal the triumphal glory of God, of Love over death. That is to say, Jesus reminds them of how life in relationship with the God of Israel works.

In relationship with each other, which is another way to say keeping faith with one another, Jesus tells them that even though he shall no longer be with them in his

body, that “I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you.” He says, “I will pray the father and he will give you another councillor to be with you for ever You know him, for he dwells in you, and will be in you.” This is the Holy Spirit that gives us the breath of life, that lies deep within each of us, that connects us one with the other and with God, that makes true Jesus’ words, “Because I live, you will live also.” Having done great deeds, having himself been the sign and the wonder, Jesus out of love for us, assures us of continued relationship with him and with God.

Jesus began this part of his discourse with the caveat, “if you love me, you will keep my commandments.” It is part of that covenantal relationship Moses described back in Deuteronomy. God loves us and we are to love God. By loving God, we are to keep the commandments God asks from us. “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

But is this enough? Can we leave it here and say that this is done and dusted and explained? Not really. What does it mean to “keep my commandments?” God gave the commandments on Sinai and the law, but how do we actually do this in real life? How do we make this work? In the world of the Gospel of Matthew it means loving God by loving neighbour; that idea of as you did it to the least of these my children, you did it to me. In each and every person whom we show love and compassion, we show love and compassion to God and keep the Great Commandment. It isn’t very different here in the Gospel of John Here, Jesus tells his disciples to “love

one another as I have loved you.” It is even the message that Jesus gives from the cross, even at that last hour creating communities of love and relationship. “Woman behold thy son,” he tells his mother. “Man behold thy mother,” he tells his friend. Love is an action and an action for which we have a model in Jesus.

God has done great things for us, choosing Israel, loving and guiding the people, sending the prophets when they went astray, and later, sending Jesus, God incarnate, to sanctify and confirm the goodness of creation and of humanity, to bring the rest of the world into relationship with this God, defeating death, and showing the supremacy of Love. God has done all this for us and called us into relationship. God has asked of us one thing: to keep the commandment given us, the commandment to love God and love one another, actions that are one and the same. In choosing love, in choosing to love God by loving neighbour, to love one another as God loves us, we choose the path that leads away from greed and self-interest, away from violence and hate, choose the path that leads to reconciliation and atonement with God.

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