

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish  
Newark, DE  
The Fifth Sunday of Easter & Mother's Day – May 14, 2017/Year A  
Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14  
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*May my words reveal the greater glory of God in our risen Lord Christ.*

AMEN

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*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Those first communities of The Way, like that of John's Gospel, heard these words in the context of a **particular time and particular events** in their lives. The persecution of "those Jesus followers" was real and rampant all around them. It was a time they were called to **lean and live into** this faith of Jesus as THEIR way, THEIR truth, and THEIR life, even to THEIR death. Now two millennia later, the words of Jesus invitation into this LIVING faith still echo for those of us along this journey, but it is a different time and context. Sadly, these same words of invitation into a LIVING faith are often used as a bludgeon against "those other people." They can be ripe for abuse as I saw unfold this Wednesday past on the Green of the university campus. Sadly ripe for abuse, and THIS is the Jesus the world sees and walks away in profound sadness and disgust.

*"A rabbi, a minister, and an imam walk into an Indian restaurant ..."* It sounds like the start of a joke but it is a true story. In a New York Times article from November 2009, the world came to meet **Rabbi Ted Falcon, the Reverend Don Mackenzie, and Sheik Jamal Rahman** walking into an Indian restaurant, and afterward a Presbyterian church. The sanctuary was full of people who came to hear them share about how they have wrestled with their religious differences and emerged as friends. They call themselves the **interfaith amigos**, and while they do sometimes seem more like a stand-up comedy team than a trio of clergymen, they share a serious burden and common mission in making a case for interfaith understanding and living.

They became close not by avoiding or glossing over their conflicts, but by running straight at them. They put EVERYTHING on the table – the verses they found offensive in one another's holy books, anti-Semitism, violence in the name of religion, claims by each faith to have the exclusive hold on truth, and, of course, Israel. **"One of the problems in the past with interfaith dialogue is we've been too unwilling to upset each other,"** Rabbi Falcon told the crowd. **"We try to honor the truth. This is the truth for you, and this is the truth for me. It may not be reconcilable, but it is important to refuse to make the other the enemy."** Asked what is the hardest issue they have faced into together, the minister and the sheik simultaneously said, **"Israel"** and the rabbi responds, **"Yeah, because these guys still don't understand all that surround us as a people."** And then they laugh!

What distinguishes **the amigos** is a unique approach to what they call **the spirituality of interfaith relations**. At that Presbyterian church in Nashville, the three clergymen stood up and declared what they most valued as the core teachings of their tradition. The minister said **unconditional love**, the sheik said **compassion**, and the rabbi said **oneness and unity**.

The room grew quiet as then they shared what each regarded as the **untruths** in their faith. The minister said that one untruth for him was that “Christianity is **the only way to God**” The rabbi said for him it was the notion of Jews as **the chosen people**. The sheik said it was the “sword verses” in the Koran, like **kill the unbeliever**. “**It is a verse taken out of context,**” Sheik Rahman said, pointing out that the previous verse says that **God has no love for aggressors**. “**But we have to acknowledge that ‘kill the unbelievers’ is an awkward verse. Some verses are literal, some are metaphorical, but the Koran doesn’t say which is which.**” At the conclusion of their presentation, one participant said, “**Talking about the untruths of each tradition is very courageous. It gets it out of the platitude category and into dialogue.**”

*“I am the way, and the truth, and the life ...”* As the fourth of the Gospel authors, John takes the breadth and wealth of the Jesus narratives in life from Mark, Matthew, and Luke, and unveils the deeper level of Jesus as Son of Man and Son of God. John does not follow a chronological, historical, or geographically accurate rendition of the life of Jesus. John does follow the revelatory nature of God in this Jesus who becomes the Christ through the crucifixion into his resurrection. **John writes to a particular community, in a particular time with particular events of life.**

The Jesus that has emerged for me in these days and times of life, the LIVING Jesus I am called to lean and live into by my faith, is the one much more like “*A rabbi, a minister, and an imam walk into an Indian restaurant ...*” Jesus who knows WHO he is by embracing and being embraced by WHOSE he is as beloved of God, gathers in holy conversations with Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, and all those who have journeyed this earthly plain knowing that there is more, so MUCH more, to our lives that God desires and has created us to be.

The resurrected Jesus invites me, calls me, into the living faith, this **Jesus Movement** as you have heard and will continue to hear much about into our future as THIS particular people of the way. I embody this call into resurrection living as reflected on by Fr. Richard Rohr in one of his daily e-meditations this week ...

**“I believe the meaning of the Resurrection of Jesus is summed up in the climactic line from the Song of Songs, “Love is stronger than death” (8:6). If the blank white banner that the Risen Christ usually holds in Christian art should say anything, it should say: “Love will win!” Love is all that remains. Love and life are finally the same thing, and you know that for yourself once you have walked through death.**

**Love has you. Love is you. Love alone, and your deep need for love, recognizes love everywhere else. Remember that you already are what you are seeking. As Paul states, any fear “that your lack of fidelity could cancel God’s fidelity, is absurd” (Romans 3:3-4). Love can finally overcome fear, and your house will be rebuilt on a**

**new and solid foundation. This foundation was always there, but it takes a long time to find that “It is love alone that lasts” (1 Corinthians 13:13). All you have loved in your life and been loved by are eternal and true.”**

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There is the story of a young man who sought out the opinion of an older man about what was important to be seen as a **spiritual person** by those around him. The old man replied, “**Even if someone were to fast six days in a week and to hang by their nose in the public square, he could not equal the one who serves the sick, the poor, the lonely, and the ones where Jesus is.**”

What are we hearing here? The answer is clear. Only, the old man says, if we have spent our lives taking care of those who could not take care of themselves. Why? Because this is the Word that most echoes the life of Jesus. Those who follow the Jesus, who follow the ways of Loving in the world who walks from Galilee to Jerusalem curing the sick, and contesting with those along the way who would say that keeping the Law is greater than addressing the needs of the people.

But who are **they**? **THEY** are anyone who needs us over and over again because there is no one else there to care for them. That is the holiness that ought to be the fruit of all our religious practices, and it cannot be substituted for by “playing holy” for all to see while living only for ourselves. I saw this lived out in response to the “evangelizers” on the university green this week to be surrounded by countless students who pulled paper from their notebooks and wrote on them one word of ultimate truth ... **LOVE!**

Do not think that the spiritual life is only and all about **YOU**. The truth is that the only purpose of the spiritual life is to see the world as God and Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha, Confucius and **ALL** who seek the Holy One in this earthly plain, and **to lean into living through this world**. It is about becoming **the spiritual person** that sees life in our faith through the eyes of Jesus. Then, like Jesus, and **ALL** the seekers of living faith by all these pathways, bow to become the miracle the world awaits with all others ... the miracle that is **YOU!**

*AMEN*