

Year B
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Acts 1:15-17, 21-26
Psalm 1
1 John 5:9-13
John 17:6-19

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

It's the seventh Sunday of Easter, and next Sunday is Pentecost! This time has gone so fast, so much has happened, and more is on the horizon. Yes, I am going to mention "the elephant in the room." An email went out yesterday morning, and you'll be getting a paper version in your snail mail soon, about the arrival of our new interim rector, Father Rob Banse. His first Sunday will be in two weeks—on the 30th. Some of you know Rob, and know how much he has to offer Christ Church's transition and search process. I am excited to meet him. And if you've read the letter, you know that, in order for me to become a candidate to be your rector, I need to leave Christ Church during your search process. This requirement might seem harsh, and it is certainly hard for me, but it is also very healthy, really—both for your search, and for me. Because in having this time apart to discern and to pray, we will know whether we really want to be together for years to come, or not. So for the past little while, I've been alternately humbled and honored that the vestry wants me to be able to be a candidate for rector when the time comes, and also grieving that I have to leave soon.

It seems like there's been a lot of leave-taking lately, hasn't there? Even in the gospel lesson today Jesus is preparing his disciples for his leaving. You might remember that in this passage Jesus is sharing his last supper with the disciples in the upper room. Before today's lesson, Jesus had washed their feet, and sent Judas away to betray him, and told Peter that Peter will deny him three times. Then Jesus spent considerable time explaining things to his disciples, and, in various ways, exhorting them to love one another. Now he is praying for them. This is the ultimate intercessory prayer: Jesus is asking his Father to protect his disciples, because he knows that the world hates them because they are preaching his Word—the word of love, and truth. Then, as now, the world doesn't really sit easily with either of these things. People in positions of power, especially, tend to be threatened by them. Jesus embodied these things, and they crucified him for it. And called his followers to live these things as well. Love and truth. How can we be faithful to these things?

Love: Jesus says that God is love, and he calls us to love one another and he loves us. There are many kinds of love—love of a sibling, love of a parent, love of a friend, love of a spouse, love of a child. We don't love everyone in the same way. And remember we talked before about how love is not just a warm and fuzzy emotion, but a set of behaviors. It is an active verb—love is patient, kind, never boastful or jealous or rude. Love forgives, even if the person isn't worthy of forgiveness. In fact you can love someone, even if you don't like them very much. Jesus asks us to do it. And the world says this behavior is not the thing to do. The world says we should get revenge, that we should put people in their place, that we should give as good as we get when we're

treated badly. The world says we should toot our own horn, and be rude, if it seems appropriate, and cheat people, if they're stupid enough to be cheated. And so when there are people who don't do these things, when there are people who act with love, we're a threat. And the world will work hard to win us over—to bring us down.

Years ago I helped lead a group of nursing students on medical mission to Juarez in Mexico. We worked for a week in a clinic that was located just outside the huge city dump—where thousands of people actually lived in poverty and squalor. We especially provided vaccinations, well-child visits, and women's health care. One morning a young woman came in as our first patient with her newborn baby, that she'd given birth to by herself in the night. She had him swaddled in a black plastic garbage bag, because that's all she could find. We helped her clean her baby and herself, and the nurse practitioner checked them both over thoroughly. Amazingly, they were both fine. We sent them on their way with food, clothes, blankets and diapers—and encouragement to come back again. The world is threatened by love, but Jesus calls us to love one another.

Truth: Jesus says “Sanctify them in the truth. Your [God's] word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Again, the truth can be so threatening. So often, if we tell the truth, someone, or some group of people, will suffer for it. In terms of the people living in the dump, the truth is that thousands of human beings forage in the landfill for food, and for materials to construct clothing and shelter. The government looks the other way—and then allows us to bring our medicines and students in to help with the situation. The residents of Juarez know people are living like this, and they also look the other way. One of the reasons I know this is that later that same day, I was talking with a man in the market, who asked what had brought our group to Mexico. When I told him, he was irritated at our mission, “I don't see why you are helping *those* people. They are trash. That's why they live in the dump. You people think you're helping us, but you're not. Let them die.” I think this man was threatened by what we were doing, and ashamed that we sent missionaries to address a problem that he would rather ignore.

When YOU walk in love and in truth, what does that look like? Who is hard for you to love? What truth is hard to face? The world can make things very difficult. Thankfully, Jesus said he gives us his Spirit to guide and strengthen us in doing our work. This way, he promised to be with us always. Turn to the Spirit for help.

And in the year to come embrace the discernment of the self-study, and the search process. Walk in love, and in truth, and do the work that you need to do to find out what Christ Church wants to become in the years to come.

Amen

The Rev. Melanie K. Lewis