When Jesus Prays

Seventh Sunday of Easter (C)|| June 1, 2025 || 9:30am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22-12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Here we are at the last Sunday of the Season of Easter – and I would like to spend a few minutes reflecting on the joy and love that has been offered in this sanctuary since the Alleluia's returned on April 20th. If that seems like AGES or a lifetime ago, I'm going to invite us to recapture some of that fresh wonder – sparkly joy and to make an intentional choice to carry some of that with us as we turn the corner into the next season – the Season of Pentecost and beyond!

Next week we celebrate the birth of the church, and are going to do it up big with baptisms, doves, prayers FLAMES of the holy spirit and we'll all be decked out in Red and Orange.

For this morning, I'm going to invite us to engage ALL of our senses in order to identify, capture and hold on to one Easter or Resurrection moment that you can refer to throughout the summer ahead.

Perhaps you were moved by the flowers at one of our services – they have been spectacular. Perhaps you felt the tug of the Holy Spirit as you knelt at the altar rail, overheard one of our remarkable children, or were brought up short by a memory evoked by one of our hymns. Today is the day to reflect and center any one of those meaningful encounters you had during this Easter season. Please center this memory, perhaps offer God gratitude, and file it away for further reflection that might draw you deeper into your faith and understanding of God.

This morning Jesus prays for the disciples and for us. Today's gospel passage from John is a portion of a much longer prayer Jesus offered the night before he was crucified.

As a kid, I remember being surprised that Jesus prayed. I thought that his thoughts were God's thoughts, and that anything that he said or did was instantaneously communicated to God.

The Ursuline Nuns, who were responsible for my High School education (shout out to the School of the Brown County Ursulines!) assured me that Jesus' praying was reflective of his human side, not the divine – we can spend time later dissecting how I came to understand that halvesies! But I am grateful that I wasn't dissuaded from paying attention to how Jesus prayed.

When Jesus asks God to love "not only these, but also those who will believe in me through their word" He is essentially praying for each of us. We are the people whom he trusted would come to understand his life and teachings based on the word of our scriptural ancestors who would tell people about Jesus, – based on their travels and direct experience of God, and then they would tell people – and like the Faberge shampoo commercial in the 1970s they would tell two friends – and so on and so one, until we are sitting here today as the inheritors of that trust and belief.

I have wrestled with this particular passage because I thought it was a classic tautology -

I in them, you in me, you in them, we in thee.

No matter the prayer's structure, Jesus' plea and prayer to God is that we all may be one – so that we each may know that we are loved by God, that Jesus loves us and that as he loves us, we are to love one another.

The Easter Season celebrates the love of Christ overcoming death to continue through the ages, so we are right to ask ourselves and one another on this last Sunday of Easter – where did you experience love, or where were you surprised by kindness? Can you reflect upon that moment, give thanks and inwardly hold and keep that experience so that when you need it, when you are feeling lonely, or scared, angry or mad, you can take a deep breath and go retrieve that moment of Easter love and surprise?

What is that holy, grace-filled moment from this Season of Easter that you might take with you on the adventures ahead? What is that moment when you felt connected to God, or to a force greater than yourself and you felt seen, known, loved and spiritually satisfied?

My spiritual life is currently quite filled with those Holy moments, but I'll offer one small one that continues to delight me, connect me to God and will carry with me as an Easter gift. We were a couple weeks into the Easter season when a struggling parishioner saw me after the service in the Narthex and caught me as I was moving from the joy of the children ringing the bell after the service and tidying up, and all she said was, "I'm glad I came...." She and I knew that there were many things weighing on her and it had taken an enormous effort to come to church, but that quick aside was so beautiful – and I hold on to it closely. She joined us in person, put aside multiple things pulling her in every other direction, and participated in a service, passed the peace, was greeted, fed, prayed for and participated in prayer. THAT is my Easter moment, when I felt as though this community delighted God, did our job, and fueled or recharged someone to return to the challenges that she temporarily left at home.

It wasn't a come to Jesus moment. It wasn't loud or accompanied by anything other than a heart connection. For our exchange, the Narthex was a holy and sacred place. "I'm glad I came." I don't know that I could ask for anything more wonderful – and there have been a whole host of highlights and exclamations. This was simply a knowing, quiet exchange and acknowledgement, for which I am very grateful.

Those experiences are precious and God asks that we cherish them in order to feel connected to God and to each other. It is up to you whether you share your sacred moment or Easter experience with anyone else. If you think it would enhance or deepen your understanding, by

all means – please share. Perhaps we can make space on the St. Andrew's website for a few of those spiritual insights – the world needs more love, and perhaps you feel brave enough to share yours.

But you needn't tell anyone else. You could simply hold onto it yourself and give God thanks. You might reflect on how Jesus prayed for us two thousand years ago that we might have these sorts of holy and sacred experiences of belief and connection and then give Him thanks, silently or aloud.

May each of us navigate the days ahead with intentional spiritual nourishment. May we reflect on the love that we discovered or experienced based in Easter Joy. And with some intentional effort, may we carry it with us, so that it is part of us and may we find that it sustains us for the weeks, months and years ahead. Amen+