

April 27, 2008

**Sermon by The Rev. Lusmarina Campos Garcia**

Based on John 14:15-21 and Acts 17:22-31

You know as well as I  
Just how this life was meant to be  
that nothing in this world could stand between your love and me.  
You know as well as I  
the space between us disappears  
if we accept love's longing and the blessing of its tears  
and so my love I am not afraid of sorrow or of pain  
for every path I take just brings me back to you again.

Just as in moonless night we miss the beauty of the sea  
Just as a song without a singer is just a melody  
Just as the colors of the earth will dim without the rain  
Just as a poet's words can ease our loneliness and pain  
To live without the ache of love is not the life I choose  
You are my life and I have no existence without you.  
(English version by Sonnenberg)

These are words of a song written by Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes, the Brazilian fathers of Bossa Nova. I thought of this song because the bible readings this morning speak about truth, the undeniable truth that we have our being and our existence in God. There is no "us" without God. And God would not be the same without us. By "us" I mean, the whole of creation.

Paul was brilliant when speaking to the Athenians. He took the advantage of the altar "to the unknown God" to present his God: the creator and sustainer of all that is, the one in whom "we live and move and have our being." He emphasized the oneness of humanity: "from one ancestor God made all nations." The Greeks did not have the concept of a First Man from whom all humanity descended. Paul quoted Aratus (Phaenomena 5), a Stoic poet born about 315 B.C. when using the words, "For we too are his offspring." And Paul said that those words were pointing to this God he was presenting; the one in whom "we live and move and have our being." This God is revealed, present and judging the world through Jesus, the one raised from the dead.

The Gospel reading completes the notion of who God is. This time it is Jesus who speaks. He is answering to the request of Philip asking Jesus, "show us the father!" Pastor Lia reflected on the first part of Jesus' answer last Sunday in which Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Do you remember what Pastor Lia said in her sermon?

The second part of the answer, based on today's reading, presents the "Spirit of truth." God is revealed in Jesus as well as in the "Spirit of truth." But God the Father, besides being God in Jesus and God in the "Spirit of truth", is God in us. The reading says, "You know him because he abides in you, and he will be in you." God is in us through the "Spirit of truth". Is there anything more beautiful and more astonishing than this, that God abides in us, that he is in us? Do you believe that God is in you?

What does it mean having the "Spirit of truth" in us? It means "being in the truth". According to Geiko Muller-Fahrenheit, a German theologian whose book, *God's Spirit*, the confirmation students are reading, "being in the truth" means "accepting the truth," in other words, "saying Yes to the rhythms and arrangements by which creation develops." To recognize the consistency and the beauty of God's ordinances is to praise

God and praising the Creator "is the first utterance of the human spirit to emerge from perception of the truth." Had you made the connection between truth and thankfulness? Our perception of the truth unfolds in gratitude.

Geiko continues: "Accepting the truth does not mean merely acquiescing to the truth of our particular life, but embracing it with stout heart and level head. It is a matter of accepting not only our transience but also our strengths and weaknesses, our fragility and our history. It is not easy to admit the truth of our particular existence, for we are always inclined to see ourselves inappropriately. We either despise or are enamored with ourselves. We either mistreat or indulge ourselves. We willingly deceive ourselves about the depths of our lives".

Accepting the truth of God's ordinances in creation and in our lives opens the door to thanksgiving. What are you thankful for today?

We come from different places, different realities. We were raised with different values and perspectives. Our perceptions of truth are also different. Our tendency is to attach ourselves to our cultural, social and religious heritage and defend it as the truth, sometimes the only valid truth. But as we learn more about other people's lives, knowledge and experiences, we also learn that our truth is not the only one. Our world is complex. Paul already said two millennia ago, "we know only in part" (1 Cor. 13:9). What we learned, what we know, what we believe cannot contain the complexity of God's own creation.

What does "being in the truth," mean when we recognize the complexity of reality and even of ourselves? Geiko says that, "first of all, it means that today no human being can master the task of "being in the truth" alone. Here we appreciate the profoundly communal aspect of truth. No one possesses the truth for himself or herself alone. Rather, truth is something that asks to be communicated and imparted and seeks to be understood. Therefore we need working communities or groups in which we can discover and practice together methods of research and knowledge now available to us." We need working communities that can discern what ethical values are meaningful for our time based on scientific, political, social, economic and experiential data.

"Being in the truth also means that we have to associate with others in the search for a consistent and comprehensible image of reality. This requires us to leave the supposedly safe haven of our 'expertise' (and experience) in search of a co-operative understanding."

Finally, "being in the truth" is before and after all, being capable of love. The gospel reading this morning starts with the words, "if you love me, you will keep my commandments." Jesus is referring to the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." It seems that there is a condition for us to receive the "Spirit of truth," and the condition is love. We don't choose our neighbors. Anybody can move into our neighborhood. And Jesus didn't say we could select those we are going to love. Even the unexpected, unkind, ugly, dirty, morally questionable, imprudent, disgusting person is someone we are called to love as ourselves. Love is not a subjective concept. Love is concrete. We love people. We don't love an idea of people. Love is painful. Love also is a surprising joy.

"Being in the truth" is to be in God, who is love. In him we "we live and move and have our being."

Now the song is sang:

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Just how this life was meant to be  
that nothing in this world could stand between your love and me.

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