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John 14.23-29
Easter 6C
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Years ago, an Alabama priest invited the great writer and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor to come speak to his congregation. “‘What do you want me to talk about?’ [she] asked him. **‘Come tell us what is saving your life right now,’** he answered.” Taylor writes, “It was as if he had swept his arm across a dusty table and brushed all the formal china to the ground. I did not have to try to say correct things that were true for everyone. I did not have to use theological language that conformed to the historical teachings of the church. All I had to do was figure out what my life depended on. All I had to do was figure out how I stayed as close to that reality as I could, and then find some way to talk about it that helped my listeners figure out those same things for themselves.

The answers I gave all those years ago are not the same answers I would give today—that is the beauty of the question—but the principle is the same. What is saving my life now is the conviction that there is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experiences of human life on earth. My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life right now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world.”¹

Tell us: what is saving your life right now? I am convinced the gospel writer of today’s John 14 lesson would love that question and Taylor’s response because it is the same sort of question he is posing through these final scenes with Jesus and his disciples. For those of you who have been with us for several weeks now, we have moved in and out of John 13-14 repeatedly through Lent and Easter. John wants to make sure that readers get the message that the Jesus Way is paved with love—love Jesus, love each other, love God, love all. He is describing a way of living a shared, intentional life with a particular community that ripples out across the village, into the next one, word spreading, love expanding. The way is very much tied to one’s life.

¹ *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor, p. xvii

John also repeats the consequences of loving as Jesus commands: this kind of love is recognized by those witnessing your life (which we've covered for many weeks now) now grows as this kind of love brings a flourishing peace, and this kind of love is the dwelling place of God.

To spend Easter in Acts and John's gospel has meant unpacking and deconstructing some of the ways of understanding the Christian story made popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One version of the Christian story goes: we live down here in a broken world, we ourselves are deeply broken, God and Jesus dwell on thrones above in a perfect land that's waiting for us, and communication between the two worlds is a vertical exchange by way of prayer aided by the Holy Spirit.

However, when we set aside that summary and begin to look both at scripture and the breadth of Christian tradition, we start to get a different story—a simultaneously broader and more personal story. It is earlier in John 14 that we hear Jesus say,

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

These opening verses seem to set everything up for that vertical story of us down here in the waiting place and thrones above in the forever place. But just three paragraphs later, Jesus is talking about his mandate, his new commandment to love one another saying, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

While we read the English translations of “dwelling places” and “home,” the Greek *monen* is the same for both. It seems there are Divine dwelling places for all people that are yet to be when humanity will move toward God, but that does not seem to be the point of Jesus' teaching here. Before anything else, the Divine dwelling place will be in the midst of those who follow the Jesus Way, who take seriously the command to love as Christ loved. In that home, the Divine moves toward humanity to live “alongside them.”² John is less concerned with what comes next somewhere else and

² http://www.progressiveinvolvement.com/progressive_involvement/2010/05/lectionary-blogging-john-14-2329.html

more concerned with what happens right here in the now. This life is where the way and truth and life happens.

With this one life that you have, love God and love your neighbor. With this one life that you have, love so well that everyone you encounter sees light in you. With this one life you have, embrace the Way that Jesus showed you. And not only will you experience an abiding peace that goes with you, but the home of God will be your life. God is not limited to a high, holy place. God is not locked in a temple. God is not absent and far off. God's home will be your life when you live in the Way of Christ's love and peace. We are not twiddling our thumbs and biding our time for everything to be made right somewhere else in a time we do not know. The peace of Christ is with you. The love of God is in you. The wisdom of the Spirit is guiding you. All these things make their home in you. Embrace them. Wake up to them. Live into them.

Tell us: what is saving your life right now? Barbara Brown Taylor gathered her answers to that question in her book *An Altar in the World* in which she explored practices of being and noticing that transform the ordinary everyday—walking, fasting, eating, working, loving, praying—into the dwelling places of God. Hoping that her ways of noticing might spark ours, she writes, “My hope is that reading them will help you see the red X under your feet...[to] help you recognize some of the altars in this world—ordinary-looking places where human beings have met and may continue to meet up with the Divine More that they sometimes call God...Whoever you are, you are human. Wherever you are, you live in the world, which is just waiting for you to notice the holiness in it. So welcome to your own priesthood, practiced at the altar of your own life.”³

When we wake up to this way of seeing our lives and seeing the world, then we begin see the Divine pulse in everything. This is when Rob Bell would say, “Everything is spiritual.” Our lives are not simply days. Gathering with friends around a table is not simply food. Pouring wine to share with those you love is not simply wine. Breaking bread to give to your neighbor is not simply bread. Love, peace, wisdom are pulsing in every exchange. The dwelling place of God is right here in our lives. What is saving your life right now? If you have forgotten, if you have not been paying attention, if you have never considered asking the question before, we start today. “The good news is that you have everything you need to begin.”⁴ God's home will be in you.

³ *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor, p. xix

⁴ *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor, p. xix