

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Gospel, Year B

THIS OLD HOUSE

John 15:9-17

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Bruce K Modahl

[Jesus said:] 9“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

DIAGNOSIS: Falling Apart

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Suspicion

Jesus is still with them at the dinner table and talking about love, but already this little band of brothers (and sisters?) is starting to fall apart. Judas left the table. They are looking over their shoulders, suspicious of one another with all this talk of betrayal and being with them only a little while longer. They are full of questions: Who is it? Where are you going? How

can we know the way? Will you show us the Father?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Isolation

Behind the disciples' suspicion is the conviction that the only person you can depend on is numero uno. Or as I have said under my breath on more than one occasion in parish ministry, "We are all in this... alone." You have to start watching out for yourself because no one else is going to watch out for you, and the world is a dangerous place.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Abandoned

We hear it said, "You have to live with yourself." In my experience I make very bad company when my only abiding place is myself. I cannot even call myself a friend. Abiding in myself alone, I am never quite alone. The accuser is present; it's voice holds the floor. I occupy inadequate shelter, dilapidated housing, an abiding place under condemnation.

PROGNOSIS: New Digs

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Befriended

Jesus calls me his friend and lays down his life for me. He joins me in my isolation, bringing me his company, even in the grave. What's more, as the one who rises from the grave, in him I have an eternal abiding place.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Encircled

No one ever accused John the Evangelist of linear thinking. Jesus promises we will abide in his love if we obey his commandment. What is this commandment you ask: That we love one another. With circular logic his words mimic what God's love does for us; it encircles us. God the Father dwells in the Son. The Son dwells in the Father. They abide in each other in the Spirit and draw us into this dwelling. God wraps us fore and aft with this mutual, indwelling love. God binds us from all sides with this love. God encircles us, our past and our future with

the love of God. With that love God draws us to each other and together to God the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. What a remarkable dwelling God constructs around us, the sort of abiding place that incubates faith.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Sent Out

Jesus chose us, appointed and elected us to go and bear fruit, fruit that abides. I know the NRSV says “lasts” but don’t miss the connection with all the other times the Evangelist writes that little word elsewhere translated “abides.” Can there be any doubt what this abiding fruit is? It is love, Jesus’ kind of love. When Jesus knew “that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,” he knelt to wash his disciples’ feet (13:3). When he knew everything was handed over to him, he turned to serve others. He died for his friends. He rose from the grave not to get even with his enemies but to turn his enemies into his chosen, appointed, and elected friends. Sent out with the power and authority to speak and do Jesus’ love, our joy is complete.

