

# Sixth Sunday of Easter

## THE UPPER ROOM

John 15:9-17

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## Analysis by Ron Starenko

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."

*Author's Note: Liturgically speaking, there are as many as seven Sundays of Easter, the first two set in the Easter story itself, the other five in John's gospel, all pre-Easter. None of the gospels were written until after Easter, as none of them would have been written without Easter. As a consequence, both the gospel writings and our living of each day, is post-Easter.*

*Contextually speaking, when John wrote his gospel the followers*

*of Jesus suffered under the threat of persecution and expulsion from the synagogue, read today when the church faces threats from within and without, tempted to return to the cave for survival, when the call was, and still is, to leave the tomb and enter the world in mission.*

*Symbolically speaking, theologically also, the image of the church as a womb not only connects to Mother's Day, which we celebrate today, but more importantly connects to God/Jesus/Holy Spirit, as in the creation story, where "God's spirit hovered over the water" (Gen. 1:2b, The Jerusalem Bible), the image of a brooding hen; as in the words of the prophet who describes God "as a mother (who) comforts her child" (Isa. 66:13); and as when Jesus weeps over an unwilling Jerusalem, lamenting how often "he desired to gather (her) children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." (Matt. 23:37b). Finally, the womb is a metaphor for the God who creates out of nothing, even out of death, bearing good news.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The Tomb Room**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Closed In**

But, first the bad, as the upper room is in turmoil. There we meet Jesus and his disciples who have gathered there prior to his betrayal and crucifixion, now in crisis. The mood of the disciples in that room, also in the room after his death, is dark. In their isolation they are turned inward, dealing with defeat, desolation, consumed by despair and death. We, too, in common with them, experience the sense of being closed in by the pressures we live with, the fears that paralyze, the need to withdraw, to pull the blanket over our heads, taking refuge in a tomb, all self-centered attempts to escape life's harsh realities. And, sadly, when we are self-absorbed, we are

loveless and joyless (v. 11).

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Dead-ended***

At the same time, we are doomed to find love and joy in the wrong places. On the one hand, we feel safe and comfortable in our confined spaces, loving our tomb-room, hoping to find something there that will sustain us. On the other hand, we are also motivated to escape the tomb, believing the illusion that we can make a life for ourselves by feeling expansive and productive and adventuresome, only to discover another kind of dead-ended-ness. That, too, reveals how we are unable to escape our darkness, as Jesus said, when he spoke to the scribes and Pharisees, how we can become “like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead” (Matt. 23:27).

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Shut Out***

And so, the more we run from the tomb, the more we remain in it, doomed to a death from which we cannot escape, left to our dreams and fantasies which sooner or later die, and we with them. And, what is that other than hiding in the upper room, hanging out with the devil and his dead-ended ways, loving death more than God, stuck then with our own choices, finally with God’s verdict, long ago spoken to the man and the woman in the garden, “the day that you sin you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17), stuck in a tomb, described by Jean-Paul Sartre in his play, “No Exit,” the hell of being alive, yet doomed forever to exist without love or joy, the eternal tomb room!

## **PROGNOSIS: The Womb Room**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Breached***

But, that is not the whole story, as God “is (the) God not of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:32b). To the womb, then, where we have no ability to create ourselves or redeem ourselves or resurrect ourselves, what is always a given, where we come to

life by a promise made to the man and the woman in the garden, how their offspring will crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), how the virgin Mary (Luke 1:30-33) will bear a son, Jesus the Christ, the eternal God in the flesh, the room where we all live and die. Is this not “the greater love” (15:13) that Jesus holds out to his disciples, how he “endured the cross, disregarding its shame” (Heb. 12:2), then rose from the grave, birthing new life, to deliver us from the tomb where we suffer death and judgment, what God suffers away forever? As a result, we now live in a room that opens to a new world already begun, the upper room, the womb room, eternal life emerging, a reality in the here-and-now (John 5:24).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Raised***

Remarkably, we grasp (better, we are grasped by) the presence of the living Lord in this room, this sanctuary, today. In the upper room described in the lesson, where fear and despair abound, Jesus shared the Passover meal with his own, in anticipation of a new day, as when the Israelites, exiting Egypt, escaped the house (the tomb) of bondage, how now Jesus, once dead and now alive forever, “the living bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:51), gathers his flock, feeding us at an open table, offering us his eternal life, yes, making us as alive as he is.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Bearing Fruit***

And so, from the womb, birthed by the Holy Spirit, we move out from the table as the people of God, entering the world, to the places where tombs abound, where hopelessness and meaninglessness smother, as we get to give witness that the whole world has been invaded by the presence of the Risen One, to be God’s people, the church, showing the way, sharing the roominess of God’s love, bridging earth and heaven. Already, before his death and resurrection, in the upper room, Jesus prayed that the Father’s love which he had received would also

be in his disciples (17:26), and would empower them, and now us, to “bear much fruit” (v. 8) as those newly-born, the baptized, emerging from the tomb and the womb, looking alive, joyful, loving, and free!