

PossABILITY Sunday Homiletical Thoughts for the Revised Common Lectionary and Narrative Lectionary

5/21/17

Revised Common Lectionary - John 14:15-21

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

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One of the themes of this text is presence. God offers His presence forever through the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who abides with the church and is in it. Throughout the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit blows where it will and makes impossible situations into opportunities of faith. The Holy Spirit can open the door where the rest of the world shudders in fear. Doors can be opened for those with mental illnesses, physical challenges, cognitive difficulties. The body of Christ comes in all kinds of abilities.

None of us likes the idea of being orphaned. The first thing God noticed was not good was that the man was alone so God created community. The idea of not being orphaned is important to those with special needs. Even though independence is the goal, often people with disabilities are excluded from school events or classes, jobs, independent living, acceptance. Parents with differently abled children are concerned about what will happen to their child when they are gone.

The church can live into these words from John's Gospel by embracing the community God gives us. Look for ways to include all people. That may mean building a ramp, de-doing the bathrooms, offering larger print bulletins, teaching members to expect and accept differences among the worshippers. Ultimately love is what defines the church. We love God by loving all of those God has created.

Consider using a PossABILITY Sunday litany or reflection.

Narrative Lectionary - Galatians 1:13-17; 2:11-21

1:13 You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. 14 I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. 15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

2:11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; 12 for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. 13 And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" 15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. 17 But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; 20 and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

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In Galatians 1:13-17, Paul describes his own conversion – once he was one way and then God called him through His grace and he was changed. This may be a chance to describe the way special needs concerns are viewed one way when they do not affect you directly and another way after someone you care about has some challenges. You may ask members of your congregation if they have needed some special accommodation due to illness or accident. Maybe they didn't realize how hard it is to get around until they were the ones impaired in some way.

Paul became a most ardent supporter of the faith through the grace of God. God's grace is open to all but we have our own ways of deciding who belongs and who doesn't belong. As a parent of special needs children, I was once told by a church patriarch that my children were not welcome at church; according to him, they did not belong. In some ways, the church has let people know they didn't belong – even if that was not the intent. When someone in a wheelchair can't get up the steps or use the bathroom at a church, they get the impression they are not welcome. When someone can't see or hear well and there are not larger print bulletins or an adequate sound system, they may feel left out.

The book of Galatians knocks down boundaries to inclusion. The common denominator is Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ justifies – not anything else. We all belong and have a place at the table because Jesus connects us to each other. Paul says “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” How does Christ live in the neuro-typical and able-bodied and how does Christ live in people with special needs?

You may want to include a little bit about the first Special Olympics Games as an example of a shift in perspective. On July 20, 1968, Eunice Kennedy Shriver opened the first Special Olympic games at Soldier Field in Chicago. She had all kinds of reasons not to be there since her younger brother Robert had been killed seven weeks before. Instead, Shriver and a crowd of less than 100 people gathered to cheer on about 1,000 athletes, who finally had the chance to belong at the Olympics. Today, more than three million athletes compete and the world has been able to see and appreciate the varying abilities of people