

Sixth Sunday of Easter, 2016 (5/1/16)
All Saints Episcopal Church, San Leandro
The Rev. Justin R. Cannon
A Cosmic Love Affair

I would like to open by sharing with you a poem, one that I wrote in 2005, when I was a senior in college, contemplating the One we call God . . .

*Who is the Intangible One
Whose face I say I have kissed?
Whose is the Hand that I believe
Wrote poetry to woo us into existence?
When will I see Him Her face-to-face?
I call that One God,
But you may call Her the Universe.
You may describe Him as the Key
To which all our hearts are tuned.
Be it Tao, Allah, Yahweh, or simply
The I-Am-Was-And-Always-Will-Be,
I call Her the Beloved.*

*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead!
Receive the super-creedal truth that
God has climbed inside of you and me
And is singing ballads
Trying to lure us back into Himself—
Into that space where we began infinity ago
When God and you and I did not exist autonomously.
I think we have forgotten the bond that held us to Her
And now we are pacing labyrinths looking for
Something-somewhat-sometime to fill the cavity
That is too small to be filled by a mustard seed,
And so large the Universe could not seal it.*

*We are exasperatedly searching
For Her, and only finding decoys.
Dear stranger, I am sorry I cannot describe
How to taste the touch of the One.
I can only tell you that He is like the wind,
Always wrapping Himself around you
Whispering and chanting your name
Calling you back into Himself.
And truthfully, She has gone so far
As to write all of creation into
An infinite charade of ballads—
Planets, light, and water.*

*You ask me to persuade you that He-She-It exists!
I could not even convince myself
Even if I could speak in emotions or within explosions.
I could not even begin to try to even take a crack at
Telling you how it is to be broken in two
Folded inside out, knotted, and bound all through
With the realization that He-She-It has taken residence
Within.*

*You ask me what all this means:
I answer, "It's all nonsense."
Since really we cannot genuinely contain
Within the words of human language
The experience of second-consciousness.
All I can tell you is that She is like this and like
That and that and that,
And compare Him to a million other things
That are all merely signs pointing to Her
With big arrows that say, "ONE WAY."
There's One Way, friend,
And I cannot walk you to that trailhead.*

*There is so much I could say, but
It has taken me this long to realize I can't.
I can only tell you this, dear friend:
Everything in this universe,
Every tad, speck, spot, nano, omni
Is revolving around one idea,
And behind that idea
Is a Being so passionately in love with you
That HeSheGod is constantly sculpting all of existence
Into a serenade dedicated to you.*

The Gospel—indeed, our faith—is the story of a cosmic love affair. This is a simple truth. The theme of the story is that God is in love with you. Let me repeat this: God is in love with you. God does love us all in some dry, distant, vague and, imprecise way. God does not love all of us as if we are just some conglomeration of humanity that he cares for, but rather his love is for each of us. I believe that more than God wants us to be good, more than God wants us to come to church, more than God wants us to learn about the Bible or recite prayers, more than anything God wants us to draw near to Godself . . . to be near to God . . . to be in a relationship with God. More than God wants us to do anything, God wants us to receive the abundance of God's spirit and blessing. God is passionately in love with you. I would like to propose that the Bible is a non-fiction romance novel of a God who came to earth to reveal Godself, to reveal God's very being in such an intimate, vulnerable, tangible way that we could understand . . . by becoming one of us—Jesus the Christ—so that we might truly understand that passionate love God has for us.

And the great thing is that there is nothing you or I could do that would diminish this love God has for us. God is pursuing us madly, wooing us in and through all of Creation, revealing his love for us, his beloved. Saint Augustine once wrote, “Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead he set before your eyes the things that he had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?”

Love, we know, is not a one-way street. There is within all of us an essential component of our being that is longing for the intimacy of a relationship with God. And at the same time God is longing for our lives to be opened more and more fully to God’s presence. Inasmuch as we hold parts of ourselves back from God, we are cutting off these areas of our life from the source of Life. The disciples learned this in their walk with Christ, though the mistakes they made along the journey, the lessons they learned, and sometimes foolish things they said (or didn’t say). They walked with their Lord—committed their lives to him, entered Jerusalem triumphantly with him, to abandon him and be shaken to the core by the trial and execution of the one who they believed was the Messiah, one who would lead them into a new Kingdom. We here, though, know that Christ’s death did not have the final word—as his Resurrection broke not only the bonds of death which held Christ, but he conquered the power of death once for all. Resurrected Christ didn’t just disappear, but hung around for forty days after his Resurrection—he broke bread with his friends, he gave Thomas an opportunity to touch his wounds, and he had breakfast with them on the beach.

Ascension Day is this Thursday, when Christ ascends into heaven to the right hand of the Father. Christ then today in the Gospel is preparing his disciples for that farewell. Doesn’t it seem that every love story has that edge of tragedy to it? He dies. He resurrects. And just when the disciples think things might be ok...he starts bidding his farewells. Farewells are never easy. When I visit my mother in Michigan, sometimes she still gets emotional when dropping me off at the airport for me to fly back here to California. And just think of everything Jesus’ companions have been through—this journey with a man who called them from their work, “Come, follow me” to whom they gave their lives, and hearts, leaving family and sometimes fortune. Does he really have to leave? Like, really?! Perhaps it would help to reframe how we think of farewells. Often we think of what is being left behind—you are leaving me, you are leaving this place, you are leaving this school. But what if instead we focused on what we are leaving towards? Every farewell there is something we are leaving and something we are leaving to go to.

Christ was with us for a time and in that time revealed the depth of God’s love for us. A fathomless love that is all giving, that is honest, a love that confronts cruelty and injustice, a love that is radically embracing of all, especially the marginalized and outcasts, and a love that is ultimately redeeming and sanctifying as our lives are transformed by Christ’s indwelt presence. The intimacy of God’s love has been made manifest, and we are invited every day to journey deeper into relationship with God. Do we accept our place in this cosmic love affair with God—and passionately pursue God as he pursues us—or do we regulate him to mere systems and ideas, recitations and formalities? May we, in this Spirit of pursuing God like a lover, live into what Christ speaks of wherein today’s

Gospel he says, “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.”

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