

“To Dwell in the House”

1st Pres San Bernardino

Ps.23; 1Jn 3:16-18, 22-23; Jn 10:11-15

5/03/09

Rev. Dr. Sandra R.Tice

“And this is God’s commandment, that we should believe in the name of God’s son Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us... All those who obey his commandments abide in him, and he [abides] in them.”
To believe, and to love each other.

I saw some of that love last Wednesday night.

Tommy Jane brought in a small lavender bundle and showed it to the Session, who looked puzzled until she explained.

“These,” she said, “are the prayers of the people, the 183 one-word prayers that people of all ages and stages in our congregation placed upon the cross during the season of Lent.”

As she explained, we remembered: Each one was written on purple paper, some were names, some were places, some were words expressing what we long for, like ‘healing’ or ‘peace’.

“When we removed the cross from the chancel,” Tommy said, “I couldn’t bear to throw these away- these represent the prayers and hopes and longings of our family.”

So she had bundled them together in such a way that none of them could be read, and she invited us to pass them around, in order to honor them.

Quietly, as she read a brief meditation on prayer, we passed them from hand to hand. We handled them delicately, as if they were precious- for of course they were. A deep silence descended on us, and a tenderness. By the time the prayers had made their way around the circle, several tears were shed.

John tells us, **“We ought to lay down our lives for one another.” “Love not in word or in speech, but in truth and action.”**

I saw some of that love a week ago, as the elders loved this congregation, as they loved the Lord who makes us One.

we are called to love each other just as he commanded.

we hold each others’ prayers in our hands, (both literally and metaphorically)

we entrust to each other our hearts’ longings.

A popular song called ‘Lean on Me’ from the 70’s was remixed a few years ago. When I was in jr. high, it seemed a perfect expression of what I, as a young Christian wanted to say to my church family, though I couldn’t

find the words: **‘Lean on me**, when you’re not strong, and I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on, for it won’t be long ‘til I’m gonna need somebody to lean on... If there is a load you have to bear that you can’t carry, I’m right up the road, I’ll share your load, if you just call me..”

I still think it is not a bad expression of what we are called to do,
And **I pray that increasingly we will find ways** to fulfill Christ’s command and bear one another’s burdens.

“... this is God’s commandment, that we should believe in the name of God’s son Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us... and John goes on to say, “All those who obey his commandments abide in him, and he [abides] in them.” **To abide is the usual way** that John talks about our relationship with God, according to D. Moody Smith at Duke Div School. Abide...hang out... stay... dwell... continue. We *abide* with Christ, Christ *abides* with us.

But what about when loving one another or believing is hard? Where is God then??

This Week marked the anniversary of the death of one of our saints, and there are several more anniversaries to come in the next few weeks- last year was a tough spring. Some of you loved Paul Mordy as much as I did, I am sure, for you knew him longer. This week I found myself reading his daughter Polly’s Blog, and she gave me permission to quote from it:

“I miss my dad every day. There has not yet been an important time since he passed that I have not whispered in my heart that I want him there... I know he would love Leah so much... I wish more than anything that he had lived to see her.

I find that any kind of holiday or birthday...is so terribly bittersweet. I am happy to see the milestones hit and I am sad that he is not here to share in the moment. When I send an email to my family I have to remind myself not to include him. I have to tell myself that I cannot pick up the phone and call...

Easter was very tough for me. I longed to be in southern CA and be worshipping at First Pres and to see him in his choir robes. I envisioned him coming down the center aisle of the church and singing with gusto. ...

It's been tough to think about faith and the risen Lord this year. It's been tough to find solace in that. I believe in it, I know it happened, [but still]... *(perhaps you can identify with what Polly is describing- perhaps you too have known bittersweet days, and difficulty believing.)*

Today when Leah woke from her afternoon nap she was very cranky. She fussed when I picked her up. So I held her close and cuddled her, we sat in the rocker and quietly rocked for about fifteen minutes. She curled close and was very still. "Be still and know that I am God". I finally was able to let in the joy of Easter for the first time this year. I thank God for his promise and his love. I thank God for the love of those around me... May the Joy of the Risen Lord be with you today and always."

A powerful image, I think, of how hard it can be to believe and to love when our hearts are heavy with grief and helplessness.

And a powerful witness to how God comes to us when we are in need: through babies, through our daily responsibilities, ***abiding with us and rocking us, until we can let the joy of Easter in.***

So I emailed Polly, and asked if I could use her words- I told her it made me think about laying down our lives for one another, about abiding in God and God in us- And she said to me, 'Actually, I am going to BE in Southern California this wknd, to see Chris in San Diego,' And so they are here. (God has such a lovely sense of humor.)

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..."

"Thy rod and thy staff" (and thy rocking chair) "they comfort me."

This is the treasure that we have to offer as the Church,

the treasure that is uniquely ours to give.

to our frantic and frightened world with needs that are never-ending:

a chance to be rocked and held

to know the Good Shepherd,

and to know that WE are known BY him,

the opportunity to Dwell in the House of the Lord, to Abide in safety.

When Mark Yaconelli was here for our Lenten retreat, he suggested that the **Church ought to do a better job of communicating that treasure.** He suggested signs saying: 'Come nap with us on Sunday!'

Come rest, and remember that you are a Beloved Child of God!

Come and be rocked for awhile...
Come, and let the joy of Easter in..

**We need to remind each other, friends,
And we need to tell those who are seeking,**
That THIS is a place
Where, no matter where we have wandered, we can come and
lie down in green pastures
Where we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
singing with gusto!
Where we can love in truth and in action-
and restore our souls.

Where are you cranky or fussy this day?
Where do you need to curl up and be quiet,
To remember who hears your prayers
Who Abides with you?

Come and be rocked for awhile...
Come to the Table...
Come, and let the joy of Easter in..

“May the Joy of the Risen Lord be with you today and always.”