Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Emmanuel Phaeton)



by Sr. Mary M. McGlone

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

May 4, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

"God shows no partiality." Really? Not even between people who cheat immigrant workers and those who risk their lives for others? What about Vladimir Putin and the Ukrainians, or Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian children? What about ... ? Well, you name them.

This is tough if it is supposed to apply to us. Peter and the early Christians faced this sort of dilemma when "gentiles" (read pagan idolaters) began to share the same faith as disciples and the Jewish converts. For them as for us, buying into the breadth of God's love may entail more than we might want to give.

Luke set up today's incident from Acts with two dreams. First, Cornelius, the centurion, dreamt that God wanted him to meet Peter. Peter dreamt of a giant picnic blanket laden with every imaginable kind of food, kosher and nonkosher, lowered before him. He was told to enjoy every variety. (Remember Tevye's dream in "Fiddler on the Roof"?) Of course, Peter refused the forbidden food until the divine message got through: "What God has made clean, you are not to call profane" (Acts 10:15). As the dream ended, messengers arrived, inviting Peter to Cornelius' home. We might call this a "providential coincidence."

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 5, 2024

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
Psalm 98
1 John 4:7-10
John 15:9-17

Coincidental? More like providential. From the very beginning, "providence" called the Christian community to see beyond their own plans to grasp what the Holy Spirit was working in the world, what today's Psalm calls God's saving power for all nations. This underlines the humbling truth that the Spirit does not belong to any nation, tongue, denomination or religious tradition. God's Spirit blows in all directions, leading toward the future that God created us for. Our part is to wonder at and appreciate how God's saving power extends to "all the ends of the Earth."

Today's anecdote from Acts gives us the real-life story that incarnates the teaching of 1 John and today's selection from Jesus' last discourse. According to the New American Bible, the First Letter of John is not so much a letter as a commentary on the Gospel of John and a defense of Jesus as truly human and divine. What we hear today can be taken as a commentary on today's Gospel message about love.

We can interpret our Gospel passage from a variety of perspectives. We could focus on the command to love, or the idea that Jesus was ready to lay down his life for his friends or even the promise that the Father will grant anything we request in the name of Jesus. Reading this selection in relation to the first reading leads to a surprising connection with Jesus' teaching that he has chosen us in order that we might share fully in his joy.

Advertisement

This begins with Jesus' invitation to remain in his love. The idea of remaining might sound like a stopping point, but it's really the opposite; dwelling in Christ's love calls us to live more deeply, more passionately, to allow Christ's love to activate everything we do.

Dwelling in Christ's love changes everything. Peter learned this with Cornelius. Harking back to the many times that Jesus went beyond the letter of the law to fulfill its purpose instead, Peter was drawn to allow love to prod him beyond the limits of his religious tradition and into the depths of what faith in Christ could call forth. The result was the joy of unexpected unity and eventually the joy of becoming free from legalities that limit the communion that can happen among very diverse people who share the same hopes.

We've heard the call to love one another, perhaps too frequently. But Christ's love is what the readings of the Sixth Sunday of Easter call forth from us and this call is likely to make us uncomfortable. Peter was uncomfortable about eating nonkosher food and communing with gentiles. Seeing the Holy Spirit at work in them transformed his mindset.

Accepting gentiles seems to pale in the light of the divisions we know today — at least the gentiles desired to know Christ. But what about those we believe are destroying life? People in whom we do not recognize any genuine faith?

This is where "remain in my love" becomes the key to our transformation. When Christ's kind of love feels impossible, perhaps a solution can be found in the first three of the 12 steps: to admit that we are powerless to love like Christ, to believe that God's grace can work wonders in us, and to invite God to accomplish in us what we cannot. Then, as people begotten by God, we too can believe what Gabriel told Mary, "For God, nothing is impossible." Our "new possible" even includes loving those we would rather despise.

Believe it or not, Christ promises it will bring us fullness of joy!

A version of this story appeared in the **April 26-May 9, 2024** print issue under the headline: God shows no partiality.