

Mother's Day/Senior Sunday/Easter 7
 Church of the Good Shepherd, Austin
 John 17:6-19
 May 13, 2018

“All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.”

I am the oldest of four children. Every year on each of our birthdays, my mother used to tell the story of our birth. She told us the city, the apartment, the year, what she and my father were feeling – anxiety, anticipation, excitement about the unknown - for the first, then for the second, for the third, for the fourth.

There was drama... there was surprise, there was humor... for me it was Greenwich Village during my father's last year of law school... after a party late at night uptown with dancing ... and a long, elated walk back to the walk-up in the Village and then the trip to St. Vincent's Hospital in fear and trembling.

(My mother used to say that by the time the fourth child was born, “Standards were lowered.”)

I have carried on this tradition with Frank and my own three children ... telling about Rachel, the first: the rose covered cottage where we lived and how we worried about the dog... and for Emily the second how we made elaborate plans for our friend who would be caring for the first, and for the third, the neighbors and their kids, who would take both girls to Salem Willows, the amusement park, while the hours passed after which the one who turned out to be their brother, Henry, was born.

There are the vivid details: the cannons shot off during the Memorial Day service at the cemetery when we rushed to the hospital... and the ritual I observed after each ordeal of birth, Frank buying a take-out coffee milkshake from the Beverly Hospital snack bar.

These are the same stories every year and they never get old. The kids have never outgrown them or gotten too cool to listen to them again

Because the stories are still true - all those things are still true – they were wanted, eagerly anticipated. Their births required pain, but we were full of joy and they were loved and they belonged, they were meant to be with us.

In the story of their birth, are the seeds that have germinated and grown into who they have become. And we don't tire of telling them because they tell the birth of us as parents, as mother and father, and from that beginning springs the whole saga of who we are as well.

When a parent is approaching death, their children gather round to listen to their final words. In the gospel of John as he prepares to depart from his friends, teaches his children like a parent does, all the wisdom that they will need to flourish after he is gone. The children they listen with extra attention because the time has grown short. His words are transmitted by the gospel writer so they can refer back to them, and for generations we have ever since returned to these chapters when Jesus is getting ready to say goodbye.

Remember how he said: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Remember how he said: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

At the end of Jesus’ last words he shifts from addressing his children to addressing God in prayer. This morning we hear what Jesus prays for his friends and what he continues to pray for us all the time.

We hear Jesus’ prayer on the Seventh Sunday of Easter at the climax of the great fifty days when we proclaim, “Alleluia, Christ is Risen.”

Jesus’ prayer recapitulates the whole story of the gospel of John. The gospel tells the story of Jesus’ birth and his death. The gospel tells the story of our birth and our death.

In the calendar of American festivals, today is Mother’s Day, a blockbuster holiday in Austin and throughout America – the only day more crowded at Central Market is Valentine’s Day, only day as impossible to get a reservation for dinner or for brunch.

Even if you try to avoid it, Mother’s Day, can evoke a cyclone of feelings - intense joy, overwhelming grief, creeping disappointment, fury, loss, wherever you are in the drama of having a mother, or of being a mother yourself.

May is also high school graduation season –high school graduation, a significant cultural rite of passage -- proms, parties, gifts, relief, fear. For kids a culmination, a turning point. For parents a time to celebrate the accomplishments of their child, a measuring point in the life of their families. Graduation is a time of apprehension as well as joy, at the same time as it is a time of accomplishment, it is also a time of loss.

The story of birth and death in the gospel of John places these two cultural “holidays” in the light of God’s ultimate sacred story that is told and tasted and lived out in this parish family of the church of the Good Shepherd.

For even in this digital age, so saturated with marketing and promises of satisfaction, there is still a hunger to see how mothering and graduating, being born and dying, have their meaning in tapestry of reality more permanent and real than the latest gadget or most recent celebrity.

There is still the desire for light for water for bread.

The gospel tells the story of the birth of the world. How *good* it is.

“All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

How *good* is marriage, wine, bread, thunder, rain, walking, dancing, and coffee milkshakes.

That good life in the beautiful world is at the same time scary, dangerous, and we are vulnerable... because of sin, ignorance, evil, stubborn turning away from the light. And simply because of mortality. This is what the gospel reading refers to as “the world,” the creation turned from which Jesus wants to protect his friends.

As we enter into this human life as Jesus did when the Word became flesh, there is no divine inoculation or anthrax suit or impregnable bomb shelter.

The story of birth and death tells that the way to encounter human fragility and even evil itself is in a posture of self giving love, being not a master, but a slave by choice, one who kneels at the feet of friends, silently washing their feet, or anoints the body of the beloved dead, lays down her life for her friends.

Jesus came to give new life, real life, a birth from above, unending life in him, enjoyment, intimacy, and companionship, love. That is the inner meaning of the birth story that we tell our children.

In the ultimate sacred story, graduation for these kids who’ve been baptized and nurtured in this household of god, graduating from high school is entering a wider world – where there will be challenges and temptations and confusion but where Jesus’ prayer and the prayer of the community will uphold them... where they will be tutored in the way of love and service.

Finally, one birth story that Jesus tells goes like this. It's a story of birth and of death at the same time. It is his story and our story, for mothers and for graduates.

Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

There were problems and there was worry and there was pain, when you were born, we loved you so much and we were full of joy. This was the beginning of your life and the birth of me and your father.

Jesus prays for you as you encounter the world. You belong and you are loved.

"All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen