

You might know Thursday was the Feast of the Ascension. Some people asked about it and I kept saying: it's coming up... But seriously. How does one talk of the spiritual and eternal? How do we even conceptualize it. Just like an intense emotion, this is beyond us to express in words and terrible jokes don't do the trick, so we use metaphor. Metaphor is able to capture a greater truth and translate it into something the mind can grasp. But before the mind, in the west we might say there is the soul and the soul knows the truth. We see this throughout the gospel of John and the other gospels where Jesus tries to convey something the soul can understand but the mind may not, by using metaphors and parables. In John's gospel, as we have in our reading today, there is a fluidity between the temporal and the eternal, between the spiritual and tangible, between the earthly and the heavenly. Perhaps this is the gospel writer's inability to fully convey the words of Jesus. Perhaps this is Jesus in his last moments with his friends, trying to teach them all he can, one last time; perhaps he is in some ecstatic, spiritual state where he is easily crossing from one plane to another. Whatever the case, we have here something both profound and confusing. So to find the good news in all of this, I would like to bite off one piece and chew on it: *to know God is eternal life*.

The term for eternal life is used repeatedly and is the focus of the passage. This word: *aionios* is where we get the word *eon*. What is an eon? Closely related to the original word, it's an age which is beyond measurement: greater than a year or a decade or a century. So the term *age* is a helpful one, but doesn't entirely capture the idea, because even an age comes to an end. Philo of Alexandria and Plato, use the same term we have here in John, in the same way Jesus is using it. This is important because there are other words in Greek that mean everlasting but more in the sense of something which goes on and on without interruption, or perpetual. Perhaps like a perpetual motion machine, which, of course, has to be created and started to move in perpetuity. But *aionios* is like time out of mind. It is time without measure. It is what Jesus calls the alpha and omega: a beginning with no starting point and end with no ending point. Therefore, to know God is to be in *aionios* – beyond time with limits – in eternal, limitless life, because, of course, God is eternal, God is limitless – God is *aionios*.

What are the implications of this? For one, as Jesus explains to the disciples, we should not let our hearts be troubled. I think of it like this. Say we played soccer and there was no clock running. That would make the game very different of course. Without the clock, there is no pressure. We can decide to try and score a goal today or tomorrow, whenever we feel like it. The clock helps create the anxiety. So many of us race against the clock of life. We need to get things done within a time frame and because of this, life brings anxiety. I am reminded of the Doobie Brothers song *Black Water* with the line: *I an't got no worries, 'cause I ain't in no hurry*. To be in the world, as Jesus says, is to be overly concerned with the temporal, which, of course, is temporary. This concern brings anxiety because we always hear a clock ticking away. But to live in the *aionios*, in the eternal helps us see things differently and to live differently. One result is less anxiety.

There is another result as well. To live in the eternal is to live in the presence of God: to know God. It is to see things through the eyes of God. For a while my daughter loved to watch super hero shows. We watched the Flash all the time until she grew out of it. I have not. One thing that was interesting about this super hero is how moving with such speed altered his perception

of time. He almost moved through a parallel world. Believing in God should alter our perception of time such that we also move through a parallel world which, not unlike a super hero, calls us to live in service to others. If I am in no rush, I don't need to speed by a homeless person on the street. If I am in no rush, I don't need to deny my instincts to be compassionate or patient. If I have no fear of a clock running out, I can live each moment. Buddhism calls this being present. How often we forget to be present and neglect one another – forget to love. Ironically, to know the infinite God brings us into the eternal which makes us love the temporal.

Look at how Jesus promises to be with the disciples always. Look at how his prayer is that they would all be one. This is flesh and bone, blood and sweat. Just as Jesus is talking about things which are far out, he is also talking about things that are very near. To Jesus, there is no separation between the two: Just as the Father and I are one... So it is not some pie in the sky notion that all of existence is subsumed in eternity. Rather, to acknowledge this reality and to live into it is to know God and to know God is to love one another. Not money. Not possessions. Not the list of things we are told to focus on, to achieve, or to get before the clock ticks down. To understand life in the eternal is to care deeply about the here and now without allowing the here and now to overwhelm us or take our eyes off the prize.

Thursday was the feast of the Ascension and so we might consider today the feast day if we like. The readings certainly can be applied. We have the reading from Acts which is Luke's version of the event. A theme that runs through Ascension Day is the idea that Jesus leaves but we are not abandoned. Rather, as we hear in John's gospel, he has sent the Comforter, the Advocate, which we discuss more thoroughly next week on the feast of Pentecost, when we ponder the notion of God as Holy Spirit. Another way that we are left but not abandoned, we see in today's reading from Acts in the simple question posed by the angels: *why do you stand looking up toward heaven?* Think of the sequence here. Only moments ago the disciples witness quite a miraculous event and the angels almost immediately ask a rhetorical question. They are really saying: get a move on. He told you what to do, now it's time to do it. We might think of it like: yes, we do receive comfort and inspiration when we look to heaven in prayer, but we also know we are not abandoned because we are the body of Christ. Christ lives in us. We carry on the work together.

We acknowledge this in baptism where we accept the reality that just as we read in John's gospel, the Spirit goes where it will, She chooses to reside in us. Just as we read in Luke's gospel, the Spirit is within us. Therefore we are never alone and never without hope. And the ultimate hope we rely on is that all of life is eternal. There is no clock running down, forcing us to be anxious. There is no definitive end we need to fear. This gift makes us free to be who we are created to be: those who love our neighbors as ourselves. They have nothing we want since everything is ours. Therefore the only true satisfaction can be found in sharing God's love. This is limitless life. This is knowing God.