

As we near Pentecost, our stories in the lectionary will lean towards this next major feast day on the Church calendar. Here we have Jesus before the crucifixion, in one of the longest episodes in John's gospel, known as the farewell discourse, instructing his disciples one last time and giving them words of comfort. Part of this is to share with them the reality of God's indwelling Spirit, the Holy Spirit, which sustains all life and helps us always be with our Creator. Jesus paved the way for the disciples and followers of his time to move from being those who followed the letter of the Law to seeing the Law as a path to God. And then takes it a step further in our passage today which assures them that the Holy Spirit is real and dwells within them always. We first see this back in John chapter 4 with the woman at the well where Jesus teaches her that true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth and that God does not dwell on a mountaintop nor in a temple but the Spirit of God goes where it will. So we see a theme in John's gospel: God is spirit and God's Spirit is with us always.

And, God's Spirit is manifest in people. In Jesus Christ. And in all who walk the earth. And we have a choice, like the disciples, and the woman at the well to accept this reality and to live into it. Not unlike receiving a gift and deciding to open the box or not. Some of us do and some of us don't. Jesus explains to his disciples that trusting in him is the equivalent of trusting or believing in God. Therefore, accepting that Jesus is the savior, the chosen one, the messiah, is to accept the truth of God's existence and abiding presence. Others in scripture have accepted the truth of God's abiding presence. The prophets, Moses, Abraham, for example. Because of this, they were compelled to live in such a way that focused on God, all their days. They were certainly fallible and could by no means be considered perfect. But they chose to live a certain way we might consider righteous. Jesus is inviting the disciples to live righteous lives as well and just like these figures from of old, because of this, he tells them that they too will face persecution. But why?

To accept the reality of god's existence, to accept the reality of God's abiding presence is transformative, and leads to repentance, a change of life where the believer wants to live righteously, being right in the eyes of God. But to be right in the eyes of God in a world so focused on the quick fix, the fast buck, and the here and now, will oftentimes mean being out of touch with the world. This inevitably leads to problems and even persecution. Take a simple situation you probably have encountered. Because you try to live righteously, you make a pledge to your church so that as an organization, the Church can do the most good, thereby honoring God. Someone says: I'm going on a great vacation and it would be fun if you and your family came along. But you have to say, I'm sorry, but because I pledge to my church as a way of being righteous before God, I don't have that kind of money. I'm sorry. Maybe next time. Now you seem a bit weird or out of sorts because who says no to a great vacation because they are giving to church instead? That's madness. Or perhaps there is a situation at work or school where someone is victimized somehow: bullied in the playground, wrongly accused, shamed for doing the right thing. You want to be right in the eyes of God so you sacrifice yourself, take up your cross, and do the right thing by helping this victim, making yourself wrong in the eyes of others. This is risky behavior. It can lead to persecution, or shaming, or even worse.

Throughout history, Christians and other people who love God and want to live righteous lives have suffered in the same way. They have lived by these words we hear in First Peter today: *Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.* We still have letters from Roman authorities wanting to arrest the early Christians for not complying or conforming to the laws but allowing them to be free because the communities love them for their charitable and generous ways. There have been abolitionists, people who fought for civil rights in our land and good people every day who lead quiet lives doing the right thing day in and day out knowing they might miss out on some fun here and there.

But the Good News can't be that living righteous lives is all drudgery and rejection. Certainly, being focused on God in this world isn't easy but it has its rewards. One is a legacy. After all, I mentioned a few groups of Christians a moment ago and we remember them for their great work and we appreciate their efforts which have changed the world, our world for the better. How do we want to be remembered? What will the memory of us be if we live righteously all our days? But of course, we don't live so we can die. What about today? Quoting a portion of psalm 27 there is a Taize song which goes: I am sure I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living; yes, I shall see the goodness of our God; hold firm, trust in the Lord. To see the goodness of God in the land of the living.

Walking in righteousness is not only about doing things day by day, but the desire to live this way comes from seeing the love of God within and all around us; each of us, everywhere we go. This disposition creates generous hearts and peaceful minds. It is a way of seeing the world. So that each day is full of joy and generosity, excitement and new discovery. This is Good News. Because the Spirit of God is all around us and within us, there is nowhere I am not in the presence of God. Even when I make the grave my bed. So I don't need to live in fear of what's around the next corner; God is there. I don't need to live for the moment because every moment is filled with God. I don't need anything because I have everything.

Therefore, by living righteously, we help others see the world in this way and learn to have this same knowledge of God's abiding presence. People come to see the presence of God at work in us. This transforms lives which transforms the world. And a world transformed by the love of God, living in peace and joy, full of generous hearts, sounds like good news to me.