

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2009

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

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

I have mentioned before, perhaps quite often, that I went to seminary at Nashotah House in Wisconsin. Nashotah is not a large seminary; in fact, it is probably the smallest in the Episcopal Church. It's sort of remote in a rural area, situated between two lakes, all quite beautiful. It is self-contained and about as High Church as it gets. Consequently, the community is very close, the same faces at chapel, in class and eating in the refectory together day after day. Seminarians see a lot of each other.

Seminarians come in all sorts and sizes and persuasions, even at Nashotah House. In my class there was a young man, I shall call him Z, from Minnesota, a true free spirit with his own unique perspective on life; we also had a man, I shall call him S, from as far from Minnesota as one can be in this country. He was the antithesis of Z, who was always in motion, never still, the poster boy for the word "uptight." Z drove him crazy.

One day after chapel, Z was in a dimension all his own, and S could take it no longer. He bellowed, "Why are you here?"

To his credit Z might have been offended, but he wasn't. To his credit Z might have said, paraphrasing this morning's lesson from the Acts

of the Apostles, “The Holy Spirit has been poured out even on people in Minnesota,” but he didn’t. He just smiled. Maybe God smiled too, or maybe God thought, “Didn’t I settle that point long, long ago?”

Jesus said to His disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” Have you been present at a Baptism? Have you felt the powerful presence of God as a person is baptized? I assure you, it’s true: God reaches out, reaches down and touches that person being baptized, and, if we could hear His words, says, “This is my child.” Infant or adult, circumcised or Gentile, it is God’s volition and God’s action that makes us His own.

Peter knew that; John knew that. John tells us that “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” That leaves no room for our bias, our questions, or our reservations about anyone. But belief isn’t just a matter of words – words come easy. Our identity as God’s children is shown by word and example, and the example set for us, the one we are to follow, is Jesus Christ.

Our identity is right there in this morning’s Gospel. Jesus tells us: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” That is a tall order. It calls for unconditional love even of those who are not at all loveable, even those who are our very antithesis because, if we are children of God, then even if it is beyond our understanding, so are they.

Years ago, in the previous *Book of Common Prayer*, of blessed memory, at the service of Morning and Evening Prayer we actually prayed for “All Sorts and Conditions of Men.” Today we would read “people.” The entire church, everywhere in the world, prayed that prayer twice a day. What a powerful statement of God’s gracious will for His children.

To complete the story, I must add that in the course of three years at Nashotah, S actually came to befriend Z. Obviously, God had something in mind for them. Z is now the Dean of a major Cathedral, and S is a Bishop.

In His Holy Name.