

Seventh Sunday of Easter

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By Sarah Hills

Introduction

Jesus in this passage prays to his Father for his disciples as he leaves them in the world without him. He will no longer be physically present with them. What does his absence mean? Or his presence? What is a ministry of presence?

What causes conflict, relationship breakdown, war? One way of conceiving broken relationships is as lack of presence. What does being present require of us?

Text

John 17:6–19

6“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Comment

Jesus in this passage prays to his Father for his disciples as he leaves them in the world without him. He will no longer be physically present with them. What does his absence mean? Or his presence? What is a ministry of presence?

What causes conflict, relationship breakdown, war? One way of conceiving broken relationships is as lack of presence. What does being present require of us? One way of defining presence is as follows:

‘Being present to another means establishing the other person as our priority.

It means seeing them for who they are and not who we want them to be or think they should be.

It means opening ourselves to receive their life into our own.

It means the vulnerability of entrusting and giving our life to the other.

It means really listening to what they say and not just what we hear or want to hear.

It means letting go of our own agendas, distractions, fears, and prejudices.

It means bringing and offering all that we are and all that we have.’

And one definition of reconciliation is , ‘when we can tell our enemy their story in such a way that they can say, yes, that is my story.’ This means that we are present to them, their story, their life. We ‘see the other’. Being present means truly being with. And this is often hard work. It’s often easier not to be really present, to spend time in our business of work, day to day life, reacting to, not being with, the other.

And so we walk past each other too fast. We say, ‘How are you?’ and don’t really want to hear anything but, ‘I’m fine’. We push our own agendas, we interrupt each other, we don’t take each other seriously. We judge and exclude if we don’t like someone or find them difficult. We decide that we get what we pay for.

Jesus here is asking God to enable the disciples to live as if he is still with them. To sanctify them in the truth of his risen presence. Because there is no life outside the life with God. Just an absent sort of life, where the kingdom of earth trumps the kingdom of heaven. And the kingdom of earth doesn’t work very well.

All we need to do is to realise that being present is being with the risen Christ who is himself present with us. That’s all we need to do to be worthy of God. To

discover the kingdom of heaven, the joy made complete. It's outrageously simple. And radically difficult. Being truly present is counter cultural. It makes us vulnerable.

Being with the other is what reconciliation is about. Accepting Gods outrageous grace, and then sharing it with others, those who are different, those we don't like, those we find difficult, is about being truly present before God. Open, vulnerable, taking that risk of really being seen for who we are. It is just this being present that makes us worthy. It is this being present that transforms our lives, that gives us hope, love and the abundant gifts that God invites us into. Into a reconciled life with him and with others.

Response

It seems that we fall into practicing a ministry of absence today – in politics, in the church, in the building of walls, in the keeping others out, in threatening nuclear missiles and the rest of the ways we make conflict, and in and out groups...so instead, can we pray for each other to be truly present? And then can we practice being present? How might we enable a ministry of presence rather than a ministry of absence in our lives, our world?

Prayer

A Prayer of Presence

I rise today
By the grace of God
And commit myself
To being fully present for your world

Today, I pray
For areas of conflict and trauma,
For perpetrators of violence and for those who suffer,
And for peace and reconciliation amongst all peoples

Today, I commit to learning
From history,
From those who are different to me,
And from those whom I find it difficult to love

Today, Lord, help me
To heal the wounds of history,
To live with difference and celebrate diversity,
And to build a culture of peace

Lord, sanctify me
To be present in word and deed,
Through Christ our Lord

Amen

