

Fifth Sunday in Easter
Revelation 21:1-6, Psalm 148, John 13:31-35
April 24, 2016
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We always start our Bible study classes by praying the Sunday Collect together. It is not uncommon for us to spend a little time talking about what some aspect of that prayer means. After we prayed last Thursday morning, someone asked, "What does it mean to have eternal life by knowing God?" This led to a discussion of what it means to know God.

I explained that in the Bible to know someone often meant to be intimate as in Genesis when we read that Adam knew his wife Eve. While we can't know God in this way, how then do we become intimate in a non-physical way?

In the first place, we know God as revealed in Jesus. Jesus reveals the glory of the Father, and God's glory is revealed through the son. Jesus says elsewhere in John's gospel, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." We know God, then, through our reading and study of the gospels.

We also come to know God through prayer. We can be fully self-revealing in prayer and trust God to hear us, keep our deepest secrets, and gently transform our lives through compassion and mercy.

We can also know God through the created order. Early Celtic Christians described creation as God's earliest bible or original scripture. In creation we find endless diversity, unheralded beauty, ingenious creativity and unparalleled order.

What a perfect psalm for this Sunday after Earth Day! Nearly every aspect of creation is mentioned including angels, shining stars, sea monsters, tempestuous wind, cedars, creeping things and winged birds. "Let them all praise the Name of the Lord," the psalmist writes.

One part of this amazing creation is, of course, we humans, made in God's likeness, mentioned in the psalm as "kings, princes and all rulers" as well as "men and maidens, young and old together."

When we live up to and into the glory God intends for us, we can reveal the divine nature as well.

The story is told of a little boy who wanted to know God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived so he packed his suitcase with a bag of potato chips and a six-pack of root beer.

He set out and after travelling three long blocks, he came to a park bench with an old man sitting at one end of it. The man was just staring down at some pigeons searching for crumbs. Needing a little rest, the boy also sat down on the bench and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from one of his root beers when he noticed that the man looked hungry. The boy offered him some potato chips. He gratefully accepted them and smiled.

The old man's smile was so nice that the boy offered him a root beer as well hoping he would smile again. He did and the boy was so delighted that he stayed there with the old man all afternoon sharing his chips and his drinks.

As twilight approached, the boy realized how tired he was and got up to leave. After taking a few steps from the bench, he dropped his suitcase and ran back and gave the old man a big hug. The old man gave the boy his biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? He's got the most beautiful smile you've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old man, also radiant with joy, returned to his home. His son was stunned by the look of peace on his face and asked, "Dad, what did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I ate potato chips in the park with God." However, before his son could respond, he added, "You know, he is much younger than I expected."

In the passage we heard from the Revelation of John, a new heaven and a new earth seem to be folding into one another such that the divine realm and creation will never be separate again. As humanity and divinity were blended together in Jesus, this new order will all be one place as God chooses to live completely at home with mortals.

While we yet wait for this future new dwelling place without death, pain and sorrow, heaven and earth can still meet in snippets and snatches when, like the boy and the old man, we choose to love one another as Jesus commanded us to do. When we love one another, we and the larger world will know who the living God is and how that God behaves. God is love.

St. Francis de Sales, a Roman Catholic mystic who lived in the 16th and 17th centuries, was approached by one of his disciples who said, "Father, you speak so much about the love of God, but you never tell us how to achieve it. Won't you tell me how one comes to know and love God?"

St. Francis de Sales replied, "There is only one way and that is to love him."

"But you don't understand my question." The student insisted. "What I asked was, how do you engender this love of God?"

And Francis said, "By loving him."

One last time, the pupil came back with a similar question, "But what steps do you take? Just what do you do in order to come into possession of this love?"

And all Francis said was, "You begin by loving and you go on loving, and loving teaches you how to love. And the more you love, the more you learn to love."

Could Jesus have been any clearer when 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." Hard at times to do, maybe, but not hard to understand. It is the only means of healing our world. Love heals not only those who receive it, but also those who give it. AMEN.