

## **The Seventh Sunday of Easter + May 28, 2017**

What time is it? It seems I ask myself that question more than once during a typical day. Like you, I have several tools to help supply the answer: wristwatch, iPhone, appointment calendar, computer screen, calendars and clocks on the wall. There are sufficient reminders of time. In fact, some television news channels display the hour and minute on the screen perpetually.

I have one of those alarm clocks with big red letters and an annoyingly loud sound. Most of the time, though, we don't need it. We have another alarm clock in our house. Our cat. Linus usually begins his campaign to wake everyone up at around 4:30 chatting and yowling. He is so insistent. Once he has accomplished his purpose of getting everyone out of bed, Linus then goes back to sleep!

There is an abundance of tools to help us keep time. We need them, but I worry when they become too important or when tools for keeping time or telling time become obsessions. Then we forget what time is for and instead of dwelling in time and receiving time as a gift, we fill our days with a hectic sequence of just doing the next thing or getting to the next activity. In our quest to be in control of time, time ends up controlling us. And we become anxious.

I wonder what tools can be used to help us keep time. Tools to help us reframe our sense of time and live more deeply into the present moment and breathe in the love of God.

Here is one such tool ... the Paschal Candle.

During Easter, the Paschal Candle burns between the place of the word and the place of the meal. The rest of the year, it stands near the font. You can't miss it. Someone remarked to me that this is the largest Paschal Candle known to the Christian church. I think that's a bit of an exaggeration, but it is certainly noticeable. What do you notice?

*Point to the symbols on the candle:*

Jesus said I am the Alpha and the Omega. These are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. Jesus said "I am the Alpha and the Omega." The beginning and

the end. This helps us remember that Christ was before time and is beyond time. All time is entrusted to Christ.

The new candle is lighted at the Easter Vigil. Easter is at the center of our time keeping. We understand time and live in time in and through the Resurrection. The Risen Christ marks our time and guides our time.

Let this great candle be for us way of keeping time – not merely chronological time but fullness of time with and through God. See this candle as a sign of eternal life.

In our usual sense of linear time, eternal life is something reserved for the future or a promised reward after you die. Certainly, Christ is the author of all time and eternal life is forever but eternal life is also now. Eternal life is now.

I love the image in our first lesson today. Jesus is swept up into heaven. He ascends before the apostle's very eyes. They stand in wonder and awe and, perhaps, with a sense of confusion. They stand gazing in the sky.

Sky gazing is a posture we often take in the spiritual life. A friend of mine likes to say that sometimes we can get so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. So, the messengers of God ask the apostles, "Why do you stand looking up to heaven?" Put your heads back down and plant your feet firmly on the ground.

If one extreme is to get so swept up in controlling time so that time controls us, another extreme is to remove ourselves so much from the world that we get bogged down in a quest of spiritual ecstasy or a preoccupation of wondering when Jesus will come back, but God calls us to live instead in the now. With feet firmly planted on the ground we are called to live and dwell in Christ, the eternal one.

I think living now in eternal life is to live wisely. Recall the words from Psalm 90: "Teach us, Lord, to number our days and to apply our hearts to wisdom."

Living in the Risen Christ is to live wisely.

Jesus himself says it this way: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." This is what he prays to the Father as part of his farewell address and it is his prayer on behalf of the disciples. It is Jesus' prayer for us. Jesus' desire is that his followers dwell in eternal life. And

eternal life is knowing God and Jesus, whom God has sent. Eternal life describes a particular way of living.

This is eternal life – to know God and Jesus whom God has sent.

Eternal life is knowing Jesus who came from God, who is God, and who is going back to God.

I'm struck by how the apostles, once they get back down to earth after their sky gazing, return to the temple to pray together. Just so, we are gathered here to pray together. It is how we know.

This is eternal life – that we know God and Jesus whom God has sent.

The kind of knowing of which Jesus speaks and in which we dwell is a knowing that goes beyond knowing with our heads. It is a knowing that involves head and heart and a knowing that involves our whole selves.

Did you get sufficiently wet this at the outset of the liturgy, feeling the water on your body as we remembered our baptism? It is a way of knowing. Sharing Christ's peace through human touch is also a way of knowing. We know through silence, speech, music and all our senses. And it is a knowing that unfolds in relationship with each other and our neighbor. It is a knowing that involves every fiber of our being. It is the knowing that finds us being fully human.

Do you see the large cross at the center of the Paschal Candle? The cross with the five nails revealing the truth that the Risen Christ bears the wounds and that the Crucified One is precisely the Risen One. This is how the reign of Christ, the realm of eternal life, is expressed in the world – through suffering love, through the reign of mercy and compassion.

A cross marks the reign of Christ. This is not the reign of domination, or lording power over others or a reign marked by violence. This reign is marked by God's self-giving love and it is this love that conquers death. This very sign is etched on our brows, first received in baptism. As citizens of the eternal realm, we are sent into the world as practitioners of self-giving love. This is the mark of those who know God and Jesus whom God has sent.

This is eternal life – to know Christ and be known by Christ and the Christ who touches us, both head and heart, stirs up love within us. A love that ignites wisdom and justice-filled living. A love that leads to gratitude, generosity and mercy.

So, here we are again. Drawn together again by God and gathered to pray through Christ and in Christ and with Christ. And the Risen Christ will call us again to the meal and we will be fed with God's very life and with the touch of bread and wine upon our lips we will come to know, again, the living Christ. This is eternal life. Now. Amen.