



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, August 26, 2018

Proper 16

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18 | Psalm 34:15-22 | Ephesians 6:10-20 | John 6:56-69

FR. ALAN GIBSON

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Perhaps it's just a product of growing old, but I sometimes wonder what ever happened to a thing called, 'love at first sight.' No one seems to talk about it anymore. I'm told that there is now an App for that. Not too long ago poets, psychologists, Hollywood script writers and other commentators on matters of the heart freely expressed opinions on the phenomenon of love at first sight. Some say that it's not 'real' love at all, but only infatuation that can vanish as quickly as it appears. Others are more optimistic and say such fervent emotions can lead to a lifetime commitment. The human heart is a strange thing, and there are about as many ways to fall in love as there are people who have found themselves in it.

There is one thing that almost everyone who has had any experience with love will agree on: If love is to continue, it must grow in mutual knowledge with the beloved. Love cannot remain the same, but must change as two people learn more about each other and about themselves. As that happens, their love either becomes stronger or it fades away. If two people grow in their love for each other, each becomes more like the other as love shapes their lives and personalities, though they may not always admit it.

After a long and difficult discourse on bread, eternal life and heaven, Jesus finds himself abandoned by almost everyone who followed him and who seemed to love him. By the time we get to what we heard today, only the original twelve disciples remain and now even they seem less than enthusiastic about their teacher. Jesus, who seems ready to go it alone if he has to, asks, "Do you also wish to go away?" Instead of a rousing chorus of support, Peter alone speaks, but his answer has a hint of resignation. "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Peter's answer is hardly that of the headstrong man who will later offer to lay down his life for his friend (John 13:37), or cut off the ear of the High Priest's slave at Jesus' arrest (John 18:10). What we see in Peter's measured response is the power of love beginning to reshape his heart, allowing faith to come to life.

For many of Jesus' followers who had been with him up to this point, it had been a clear case of infatuation. There was something about this man that captured all their attention, for a moment. But it just didn't work out. St. John tells us earlier in the gospel that some of these people wanted to make Jesus their king. Others may have wanted a hero, or a philosopher, or perhaps just a good person whom they could admire. Whatever they were looking for, Jesus was not it. These people were looking for something to hang on to, but the last thing they were prepared to get was God.

"We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God." Even for Peter it had been a case of love at first sight, but he went a step further and took a second, then a third look. Because his heart was willing to fall in love, and he allowed himself to then learn and grow and not be tricked by impulses of emotion or easy answers, he came to realize that there was no one else for him, nowhere else for him to go. His search was complete, and so was he.

Peter's life could never be the same because, as with anyone who falls in love, his life was no longer completely his. From that moment on, Peter belonged to the One he loved, to Christ, to God. From that moment, he was bound in a commitment with the source of life and salvation. Peter wasn't always perfect in his devotion. He made mistakes and failed his Lord. But what Peter had, is the same thing we have: the guarantee that with faith comes life.

Like love, if faith is to be real in our lives it must be allowed the time and space to learn and grow. Mistakes will be part of that process, as will forgiveness (which is probably the truest sign of love). If we allow ourselves to look, like Peter, through the eyes of faith we too will come to know and love the Holy One of God who knows and loves us, already. As that happens, we can't help but become more and more like the one we love, like Christ himself.