John 15: 9-17
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2024
The Rev. Katherine Bush

To let you know a little bit about the headspace I'm in these days, the subtitle of the book I'm reading right now is *Mothering Against the Apocalypse*. It's a collection of essays in which Emily Raboteau confronts among other issues: climate collapse, societal breakdown, systemic racism, destructive politics, and oh - the pandemic years while trying to raise her two young boys with a sense of hope. Her stories are about surviving and creating a family while living in a world that is by all accounts falling apart. It's a tale for our times; it's also a tale for all times.

It can be hard to recognize where we are in time when we listen to the stories from Scripture. It's difficult to hold a sense of timing because of the way the story comes to us in a layering of moments that create almost a multiverse effect. In the present moment of the Gospel, Jesus is sitting at the table having finished his last meal with his friends and Judas has just gotten up to leave to do some very dirty work. Between the meal and leaving the table to go to the garden, Jesus tells all those still in the room that they are not servants but friends and that they ought to live in love - actually *live of inside love, abide in love.* We'll come back to that. But the layering of time also means that this story is written down in a present moment between the resurrection and the time when the church finds its way forward, the gospeller is writing at the end of a chaotic century full of violence and fear and confusion. And we are reading the story on this present Sunday, 2000 years later, midway through the fifty days of Easter as we approach the feast of Pentecost and revel and slog through all that May brings. And we are listening to the story inside a present time in which we know the facts about climate change yet before the catastrophe shapes enough of our priorities to ward it off, when we know the history of cruelty and racism and before we learn how to fully repair the broken bonds between us. And in this present moment, you and I are living between so many different inflection points: between election cycles or between diagnosis and treatment or between hurt and forgiveness or between the question and the answer. We are always living between moments, that's kinda what makes a life, right?

So, let's go back to the conversation at the table and that pivotal in-between time. The meal is over, but the only person who's gotten up from the table is Judas. Even as he makes his way toward betrayal, the others are still hanging around, bellies full, listening to Jesus. And in this moment, as he knows the end is rushing at him, Jesus says *abide in love*. Abide, three times. And love, nine times. In this one little snippet of conversation, as Jesus understands he is saying farewell, Jesus tells us where and how to live. Notably, he doesn't suggest making a run for it before the armed guard comes to arrest him. Nor does he deny the reality of what's unfolding, there's no pretending here that things are less dire than they are. Abide in love. To abide means to stay, to stay right where life is happening, to make ourselves at home even in the uncertainty and danger of this world - as it has always been uncertain and a little bit dangerous. Jesus tells his friends and us to send down roots right where we are and to find the source of love here, in the room after dinner, in the spin of our frenetic lives, between the breaking news updates. Stay put and love. Stay put in love.

Back to my new friend, Emily, who is mothering in the apocalypse. Even as she is clear-eyed about the state of the world, the precarity of her home, and the risk of even trick-or-treating for her sons, she persists in taking joy, complete joy, in them and in loving the old house they are renovating and the city they call home. Her gaze moves from literal warning signs about global warming to birds and bird murals painted around New York City. And there's really very little sense of fatalism in her declaration that this is what she can do: she can love her children and take care of her garden and vote and invite friends to sit around her dinner table and talk about hard things… just as there's no real hint of despair in Jesus calling his followers to friendship and love and joy, even while one of their friends plots the next chapter.

Abide and love. Abide in love. It's always the in-between time, friends, and the news is always difficult. So, some questions we must consider are where we live and how we live given the facts. We have choices. We could live in fear. We might live in denial. We might be tempted to keep moving "away," as if like Jonah we thought we could escape to someplace else, someplace easier. We could hole up until things get better. Jesus got up from the table and went to the garden to pray and to be arrested. He lived in the very real world, not pretending it was anything other than broken. And he loved that world, he loved in that world.

I don't always know how to do this: how to love this broken place and these broken people and my own broken self. I'm wondering now if staying put is in and of itself an act of love. I don't mean to abide abuse or hurt, but I do mean to abide in love even in hard spaces. The way Calvary has stayed put through a multiverse of present moments including slave auctions, wars, bustling downtown life, and abandoned seasons, to stay rooted so that we can bear fruit. The way the stories of Scripture abide through millennia steadfastly telling and retelling a story of love in disparate times and desparate places. The way a mother can repair a home and teach her children the names of birds, even the endangered ones that grow more and more scarce. The way friends linger around a table to listen whether or not they know it will be the last time. Abiding in love is love. Abiding and loving are two sides of the same coin. Showing up is love. Sticking around is love. Choosing to live in hope, seeking moments of delight and joy, these are some of the ways that we abide in love.

Some stories are about loss, some dinner conversations are about surviving in the aftermath, and sometimes it's hard not to get antsy and want to move away or play pretend. Another simultaneously unfolding story is about lasting bonds of friendship, about waiting for the harvest of fruit to come on another day. Some dinner conversations are a prelude to a much bigger, longer story. In this present moment, we are invited to make ourselves at home in discomfort, to make ourselves at home in an imperfect and broken world, to make ourselves at home and love it, to make ourselves at home in love.