

Homily – The Great Realization

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I wonder what our lives will look like a year from now. We really don't know, do we? Usually, when we look in the crystal ball or read the tea leaves we know that life a year from now will be pretty much like it is today.

Some can anticipate a child going off to college or retirement. Sometimes there is a birth or a death anticipated in a family, but most of us know that a year from now, life will be pretty similar to the way it is today.

However, these days, in the this of sacrifice for the common good, we don't know what life will look like a year from now. This uncertainty, this ambiguity, this lack of control can be quite unsettling.

Today's Gospel reading is also during a time of uncertainty. Two thousand years ago Christ came into the world as a baby boy named Jesus. And, this perfect union of God and human grew into a man. Our Bible tells us that at about thirty years of age, Jesus began his earthly ministry. He gathered disciples and followers. He performed miracles. And, he taught crowds, both large and small. For some men and women, Jesus became the center of their daily lives, and they anticipated a future in which Jesus continues to perform acts of wonder.

But after about three years of public ministry, Jesus breaks the bad news to his followers. Jesus let's his disciples know that he will be leaving them. Today's Gospel reading is at the center of a series of talks that Jesus gives to his disciples about comfort. Though they are moving into a time of uncertainty, a time of ambiguity, and a time the will feel out of control – though Jesus is leaving them, they can still take comfort.

Jesus says, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live."

Like the disciples of two thousand years ago, we can take comfort knowing that God is present with us in our own times of uncertainty. We may not know what is going to happen a year from now, but we can be certain that God is with us in the highs and in the lows, even when the lows take a long time to play out.

Now, for the last two months on every Wednesday afternoon, our new bishop has been meeting with the clergy of the diocese. And, one of the things that she shared with us is this chart which has the title the “Emotional Phases of Disaster.” This chart depicts our collective reactions when we, as a society, have a catastrophe strike. The x-axis, or green bar at the bottom of the graph, is time, and as we move to the right there is a movement forward in time. The y-axis, or multi-color bar on the left side, is a measure of emotion. Being higher or closer to the top means an emotional high while being toward the bottom means an emotional low.

The squiggly red line is the normal emotional trend for a society when tragedy strikes. The part labeled impact is the specific time of the catastrophe. Two thousand years ago, for the disciples, this impact would have been the death and then subsequent resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Jesus is no longer with them in person, and the disciples feel abandoned.

And for us today the impact is when the shelter at home emergency was declared in March.

And as the chart shows, after an emergency there is a quick emotional rise as we all pull together. But, then there is an emotional crash as things drag on and on and on. Finally, at some point recovery starts. But, it often takes longer than we would like. I don't know about you, but I find some comfort in knowing that there is a normal emotional trend for us as individuals. And, there is a normal trend for us collectively as a society. Our American society is going to have some lows before we start to rise up again.

The lesson for us from today's Gospel reading is that God is present with us through all of this red line, the highs and the lows.

The lesson for us from this emotion chart is that this turmoil is going to be with us for a long time still, much longer than we would like.

Now, this past week our diocese began rolling out its re-entry policy for our forty-five Episcopal churches. Many of you will have received this policy yesterday in an email from the Bishop.

In summary the policy is broken into four phases and today we are entering phase two. The policy calls for a lot of planning to make sure we are protecting folks. The policy, in its current form, does not have us gathering for in-person worship until there is a global vaccine available. Or, there is herd immunity. You may all have some ideas in your head around how long it will still take for us have a global vaccine, but in my mind this is many months in the future.

Shall we do a collect sigh. We will be in virtual worship for many, many more months. Some churches, and some other parts of society, may start in-person gathering before we do. As the Bishop puts it, as followers of Jesus we want to make sure that we continue to prioritize human life and health. During some of the emotional lows this is going to be very hard to do. Some will believe that we are opening up too slowly and others will believe we are opening up too fast.

But, as we work our way through the normal emotional ups and downs after a tragedy we will continue to know that God is present with us. God is even present with us in this connection we have through Facebook Live. In this time of the Coronavirus, God is present with you in your virtual, digital relationships. When two people are connected to one another, I like to think that God is at the center of that connection. And, whether it is in person or digital the Spirit of God is the connection we have with one another over the ether.

Now, one more thing about the Emotional Graph.

It can be hard to know where we are in the graph. Sometimes the warning and threats that precede a disaster are invisible. But in retrospect, we look back and wonder how we could have missed the warning signs. That is the miracle of hindsight.

Today's Gospel reading shows us that when Jesus was giving comfort to them, his disciples still didn't really know what to expect. They probably only understood a small portion of what Jesus was telling them. It was only when they looked backwards in time that they would have had a better understanding of what Jesus was speaking about when he talked about an Advocate and the Spirit of Truth.

In the same way we will have hindsight to give us a better understanding of what was happening to us in 2020. My sister-in-law has pointed out that she hopes we emerge from this better not bitter as a family, as a community, as a country, and as a world. I would add that we also need to be better and not bitter as a church.

These days we may not be able to predict what is going to happen in twelve months. There may be some beautiful things that are happening to us. We don't want to miss them. Whether we know it or not, God is working in us, and through us, and with us to do some amazing things. With 2020 hindsight we will finally be able to see.

And now, I want to do something we haven't done before here at St. Barnabas. We are going to show a video called [The Great Realization or Hindsight is 2020](#). I hope this gives you a glimpse of how the Holy Spirit might be at work in our world today.

Do you see God in this video? I wonder how we can let the Holy Spirit be our guide as we look forward a year into 2021, and a new normal.