

May 29, 2011
Easter 6A
John 14:15-21

Indivisible

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Earlier this week, I sat in on a Webinar that discussed ways in which pastors are using social media to connect and communicate the Gospel. Over the past few years, there's been a lot of talk about the power – for good and for evil – of social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter. Whether we're looking for a job or looking to break out of the loneliness and isolation that results from living these fragmented lives we're forced to live; whether we look to organize disaster response or a revolution or simply a birthday party, these electronic social networking tools help us communicate and connect with people from every aspect of our life – past and present; friends and relatives; old classmates, current clients and potential associates. The power these applications harness, though, is as old and basic as human existence, and some would argue this power actually defines human existence – it's the power of relationship.

Pretty early on we learn that friendships between two people are never really between two people. My sons Jakob and Luke have been part of Faith Nursery School this year. They've a lot and they've made some friends. They have even organized their first play dates, and that's where they have started to realize that even for a three or four-year-old people are part of complicated relational networks. It's never as easy as just deciding that you are going to spend the afternoon playing with each other. You have to get parents together to agree on time, transportation, meals and snacks. And when you enter your friend's home, you realize they have brothers and sisters with stuff or their own and friends of their own. And as Jakob and Luke have started navigating the complexities of friendships with its laughter and its tears, their world is starting to expand, almost exponentially. A single friendship opens a whole other world of relationships, networks.

A few years back there was a play and then a movie called Six Degrees of Separation that explored how close everyone on the planet actually is to everyone else on the planet – not geographically, technologically, politically, religiously – but socially, relationally. You know someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows you.

The reading we just heard from John 14 is drawn from a larger subsection of John's telling of the Gospel that scholars have labeled as Jesus' farewell discourse. The section is set around the table on the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest. Through this dinner conversations, Jesus looks to teach and prepare his disciples for the events that threaten to separate them from each other for ever – Jesus will be crucified, die and be buried. He will be raised, he tells his disciples, but the risen Jesus will be present in and among them in a different way. So, farewell discourse

is really a misnomer. It is really a conversation about how our relationship with Jesus will change, deepen and grow closer after his death, resurrection and ascension.

But the most powerful and maybe most comforting and profound mystery Jesus wants to pass on to his disciples is how their relationship to him, connects them to the heavenly Father. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves you. The Father loves you because the Father loves the son and all the son loves. In the same way, the relationship allows for connection by response. As we love Jesus, we love the Father because Jesus loves the Father and we love all that Jesus loves. In this swirling relational flow, we can begin to see the expansive nature of God's love, God's household, God's family. What's more, though, is that Jesus tells, commands, his disciples to love each other in this same expansive way, so that loving your neighbor is by extension and connection a way of loving God and experiencing the presence of the triune God in all God's fullness.

And the point of connection for us – to God, to each other, to whole world – is Jesus, particularly his death and resurrection. As followers, as lovers of Jesus we relate to the world, we connect to the world through God's love, revealed fully in the cross; we relate and connect to each other in love suffers, dies and rises to bring life, healing and reconciliation.

That's how we first came to know Jesus, to believe and trust his word of life, to love him because he first loved us: We learned in a relationship, in conversation, in the sharing and telling of the good news story – sometimes with words, sometimes with acts of love – some extraordinary, some quite usual. In a little while we leave here and go out into our week where we will meet and spend time with people we've known for years and some people we have just met, but the truly wonderful thing that will happen is that through you, those people will get to know, are connected with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What a comfort – in a world where we are torn apart by divisions, separated by time and space and even lifestyle – to know that God is so close ... and not in some mystical way, but as close that brother, sister, friends who waits to meet you and share in the fellowship we enjoy with God and with each other ... in Jesus' name. Amen.