

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A
Hopkins Charge
May 17, 2020
John 14:15-21

*Speaking to all y'all
When you need me look around
You in me in you*

You've taught me a lot in the two years I've lived in Michigan, Beloved. You've taught me about pasties and goulash. You've showed me how to use my hand to explain where I live. And perhaps most importantly, you've helped me make fun of the UPers and acknowledge that I am indeed a troll, in the Michigan sense of that word.

I am grateful for that, and I intend to take those lessons with me when I move back to NC. But before I go, I need to return the favor. Just as you have shared with me things I could only learn from Michiganders, I need to share with you something that you can only learn from a Southerner.

I need to teach you the difference between "y'all" and "all y'all." Now, Pastor Andrew, you might say, isn't that just redundant? If y'all means "you all" then why do you need the extra "all" at the beginning? All you all? If you said something like that, it would be logical, but it still wouldn't be right. It's just like telling someone about Mack-in-ack Island. It would be logical, but it still wouldn't be right. Returning to "y'all" vs "all y'all" - what you really need to know is this.

Y'all does refer to more than one person, but it doesn't always. If I wanted to send home leftovers to your family, I might ask "do y'all want some?" even if you, singular, are the only person standing there. Y'all applies to you as an individual, and in some way to the people you represent. But "all y'all" is different. It means everybody. Every person is being addressed. It's the way you address a whole crowd of people, acknowledging each and every one of them.

The reason I tell you this isn't just so you can fit in when you come to visit me in North Carolina, although it might help. I share this with you because it changes the way we hear Jesus in our Gospel lesson this morning. Because when Jesus is speaking to his disciples in this passage, he is also speaking to us. To all of us. He is taking to all y'all who are listening to him.

And this is what he says. This is what he says to a community the midst of a major transition. This is what he says in a time of chaos, when nothing feels normal. This is what he says to his disciples then and now when we are overwhelmed with confusion and worry. This is what he says to the 12 gathered at a dinner table, and this is what he says to us gathered on Zoom.

I won't leave y'all as orphans. I will come to all y'all. Soon the world will no longer see me, but y'all will see me. Because I live, all y'all will live too. On that day all y'all will know that I am in my Father, y'all are in me, and I am in all y'all.

In other words, Jesus is beginning to tell his disciples goodbye. He tells them that in a little while, he will not be present with them in a way others can understand.

And yet he will be present with them all the same. Jesus tells his disciples, then and now, that even as he goes away, he will not leave us alone. Even when he has ascended to the Father, he will still be here, right here, right now.

And when we need to see him, to feel his presence, to be reminded of his love... All we need to do is look around. This is how he will be present to us. He will be in the faces of our siblings, in the voices of our sisters and brothers, in the community of faith.

And this is where the distinction between y'all and all y'all becomes even more important, Beloved. Like the first disciples, we are probably comfortable with the idea that some of our community are Jesus' presence to us. Jesus is surely present in the people who think like us, or look like us, or are least annoying to us.

And yet this is not what Jesus says about his presence. When he is no longer physically with us, when we need his presence again in a moment of confusion or chaos or concern, Jesus does not say "I will come to you and the folks like you. You and your people will be in me and I will be in you."

Instead, Beloved, this is what he says. *On that day all y'all will know that I am in my Father, y'all are in me, and I am in all y'all.* Jesus' promise to be with us even in his absence cannot be contained in me or you or the people we would prefer to be the very presence of God.

No, Jesus' promise isn't just an individual one. It is more than a promise that he will be in me and I will be in him. And it is more than a promise that he will be in you and you will be in him. This is Jesus' promise to us, Beloved. "I will be in y'all. Not just in some of y'all, but in all y'all. And as surely as I am in the Father, I am in all of you, and all y'all are in me."

This is Good News for us, Beloved. On those days when you don't sense Jesus present in your life, when you don't feel close to him, do not fear. Jesus is present in those gathered around you. On those days when you can't seem to follow Jesus' commandments despite your best efforts, do not fear. Jesus' presence is made known in the ways that our community loves one another. And on those days when y'all feel alone, when it seems like our churches have been forgotten, when our community seems disconnected, do not fear. Jesus abides in all y'all, and all y'all abide in him.

One of the strange gifts of this pandemic is that it reveals a lie that we too often believe to be true. Too often we acted as if we could get through this life on our own, that we didn't need anyone else. And now we see so clearly the ways that our lives are interconnected, and that our individual actions affect everyone around us.

I do not think it is coincidence that it is in this moment that we hear Jesus speak to us about how he is present in the plural, how his love is takes shape in all of us together, acting as one. As our society continues to change as we move through this pandemic and anticipate life on the other side, we have an opportunity to witness to the way that Jesus is made present in community.

Will our life together, as a community of faith, reflect the life of Jesus?

Will our neighbors look at our church family and see Jesus present?

Will our love for one another reveal God's love for the world that God has made?

As we wrestle with these questions, let us hear God's summons to us. Will all y'all live in me and recognize that I am present in all y'all? Let this be so.