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Sixth Sunday of Easter
Memorial Day Weekend

Today's sermon is taken from the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 15-21

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen

There are times in life that we wish life was only a movie. Things would be so much easier. When you're young you want to fast forward -- fast forward to Christmas, fast forward to getting your driver's license, fast forward to getting out from under your parents' strict rules. As an adult when times are good you would like a pause button. As a disciple suggested to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, "Wouldn't it be nice to build three booths and just remain where we are?" Why can't our children just remain adorable infants? Why can't our marriage remain forever like those early years of passion and discovery? If we just had a pause button. And some of us would like a rewind button and perhaps a delete button. If we could just go back and undo some of the things we have said and some of the things that we have done. And then some of us in later years of life would like to hit a button that would simply slow down the film; life is getting away from us so fast.

And then there are those times of crisis when we would like to pretend it was not really happening at all. Wouldn't it be great if we could say, "It's only a movie, it's only a movie? In a little while we'll be able to walk out of the theater and things will be all right." But life isn't a movie, it's real, and sometimes life hurts. Where then do we turn for encouragement? I believe there's no better place to turn than the gospel lesson for this morning from John's gospel where Jesus says to us, "Because I live, you also will live." That's it -- that's the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus is alive and because Jesus is alive, we can live lives that overcome every obstacle.

Jesus' words remind us, first of all, that we are loved. Listen now to the rest of the passage: "Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and show myself to them." Jesus is saying to us that we are loved.

In a world as immense as ours and as complicated it's easy to think of ourselves as having very little value -- cogs in a machine, numbers in a computer, faceless, nameless, unnoticed by the universe at large. No wonder there are times when we feel powerless.

I'm brought back to many years ago when in seventh grade. I still remember that because it was one of the toughest years of my life. There I was -- overweight. My mother had a way of buying clothes; I always looked pretty frumpy in them. I had a butch back then -- nowadays that's okay, but back then everybody seemed to have a different haircut. They had something called a Chicago where the inner part was cut short and the side parts were long and combed back. But there I was -- blonde haired, blue eyed with my butch, overweight and wearing frumpy clothes. I was not what they called one of the crowd. I could play baseball, I could play football, I could play basketball, but I was not one of the real hipsters if you would. And you know, and at that early age I liked jazz, and I liked classical music. I don't know why, but my uncle had bought me an album that had different excerpts from classical music, and I played it all the time on my record player. I really liked the music, and I also liked jazz. A friend of mine, the two of us used to listen to various jazz musicians, but at that time that was not being hip.

What in the world could be more de-motivating and more dispiriting and more discouraging than to think that nobody - nobody - believed in you? How could you ever believe in yourself, and that was my problem in seventh grade as I struggled. But there was this one nun. We had seventh- grade Sunday School at the public school. It was kind of interesting; it wasn't on Sunday, it was on Thursday, and the nun would come from my church and would lead the class. I was very shy, very quiet. One day the nun got me aside, she looked at me, and she said, "You seem kind of down, John." I said, "Well, I'm not really." She said, "Well, you seem like you are." And then she said to me, "You know, God loves you. Jesus loves you, loves you just as you are."

Jesus reminds us that somebody in this universe, not only notices us, but loves us, believes in us. What many people need to know is not only that they can believe in God, but God believes in them. We're not merely a nameless, faceless blob of protoplasm taking up space in the universe. The God of all universes sees us, notices us and listens to us and believes in us. Not only does Jesus love us, Jesus is always with us. "I'm in my Father," says Jesus to us, "you are in me, and I am in you." Did you hear that? Jesus is within us. We don't have to go to a mountaintop to find God. We don't have to peer through the Hubble telescope. All we have to do is to listen for the divine whisper from within ourselves. "Find a place in your heart," said an ancient sage named Theophan the Recluse, "and speak there with the Lord. It is the Lord's reception." Some people seem to find this room easily; others have more difficulty.

A friend of mine has a daughter, and when she was five years old this girl told her parents, "I know Jesus lives in my heart because when I put my hand on it, I can feel him walking around in there." Out of the mouths of babes come words of wisdom. Jesus lives within us. That's good news because as the writer of 1st John reminds us: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

A teenager named James Dungy committed suicide a few years ago. It was a terrible blow to his father Tony, who at the time was the much-respected coach of football's Indianapolis Colts, the arch rival of the New England Patriots. Many players were lifted up as the Dungy family mourned this loss. In an interview after his return as the head coach, Dungy thanked the Colts organization for its support, and then he said words that surprised no one who knew him. "My faith in Jesus," said Tony Dungy, "is what has gotten me through this."

How many of you parents have asked yourselves how you could ever cope if something tragic were to happen to one of your children. Here's how: by faith in Jesus. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." Jesus not only loves us, Jesus also lives within us, and Jesus will help us endure any crisis if we trust him.

Most people, I think, believe in God, but many people have only a God out there somewhere. They have never opened themselves to the God who dwells within. To people with this problem, God seems somehow very remote, unconcerned about their everyday cares and concerns. They have never seen God as a living presence in their lives.

A story is told of a mother who, rather than asking her children "how was your day?" did something much more helpful. As she tucked them into bed each night, she asked them this question: "Where did you meet God today?" In answer to her question about where they met God, they would answer one-by-one, "A teacher helped me." "There was a homeless person in the park." "I saw a tree with lots of flowers on it." And they finished telling her where they had met God that day, and she would tell them where she met God too.

What a grand exercise. We meet Jesus everywhere when Jesus dwells within us. We can face tomorrow because Jesus loves us, and Jesus is with us. But note one more thing: Jesus says, "Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my father, and you are in me, and I am in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me."

The love we have in Jesus is not a sentimental, mushy, feel-good experience that says we are free to do our own thing. Love for Jesus is expressed through obeying his commandments. We are soldiers, if you will, in Jesus' army in the war against every form of sin and injustice. That is what gives our lives meaning and purpose.

Now tomorrow is Memorial Day. On that day we honor those men and women who have given their lives in service to our country. The obedience that the soldier gives to those in command often puts our obedience to Jesus to shame. Captain James Key, a U.S. Army chaplain, wrote some words that I want to share with you this morning. "This past year," Captain Key writes, "I served as chaplain for a six-hundred-soldier logistics

battalion in Baghdad. These soldiers had to deliver supplies along the most dangerous routes in Iraq. When bombs exploded the reality of war forced many to do some serious soul-searching. I am back home in the States now, a safe distance away most people of our country will never fully understand. One evening, a casualty officer and I drove down the road on our way to inform a soldier's spouse that her husband had died in Iraq. As an Army chaplain, I thought about how difficult it would be for this young mother and how empty the children's lives would be without their dad."

This year, as we celebrate Memorial Day, we should pause as a nation and think about the men and women who continue to fight and die in such places as Iraq and Afghanistan. "It is true," writes Captain Key, "war is hell, freedom is expensive, death is painful, and faith still matters, especially to those in the foxhole."

Jesus put it like this: "Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus is our friend; Jesus laid down his life for us. Because Jesus lives, we can face tomorrow. Jesus loves us, Jesus dwells within us. Can we not live our lives for Jesus?

Amen

Transcribed by Phyllis K. Briggs