

Alleluia!! Christ is Risen!!

No one particularly likes goodbyes, especially the goodbyes accompanying departures. We seem to like them even less when we know that we will not see the person saying good bye for a long time.

For me departures will always be inextricably bound up with my grandfather, my “Bumpy” as we called him. There was a man who hated goodbyes. Every summer when our two week family vacation to my parents’ home towns – they lived 8 miles apart – came to an end, everything would be packed back into the car and it would be time to leave.

We always left my mother’s family first. Mom was one of six children, and we 3 of 22 grandchildren, so our summer departure never left Mom’s folks bereft. Besides, they were not particularly expressive people. They’d fuss over us a little, then Popou would return to his chair to read and granny would ply us with food, which was her way of saying I love you. Then we’d give them each a kiss and we’d be off.

It was quite ***the opposite with my dad’s parents.*** Dad was an only child and we obviously the only grandchildren. ***Goodbyes were always torturous for Bumpy.*** He’d fidget and fuss over us, and then ***always cry.*** He would ***rehearse this for a few days*** before our final departure. The last 3 or 4 days before we left for another year, every time we got in the car to go see my mom’s folks – even though we’d be back in a matter of hours – Bumpy would cry. He’d follow us out to the car, and looking at us ***with his eyes swimming with tears he’d say, “I’m surely gonna miss you all.”*** For Bumpy a single final goodbye was not enough to express how much we meant to him. By the time we’d been through a few days

of tearful goodbyes and the final long, long hug we each received, *there could be little doubt that we were the single most precious things in his life.*

When the final goodbye came Bumpy would give us the long hug and say something along the lines of, “*You’ll never know how much I love you.*” But we knew. Waving goodbye as we drove off he’d always say, “*Goodbye! Y’all take care.*”

On this is the seventh and final Sunday of the 50 day feast of Easter, there’s *an interesting dynamic at work in our readings.* Endings and departures loom large in all our readings. In Acts we hear Jesus’ final words to the disciples before He ascends. In **Peter’s letter**, written from Rome in his final days near the time of his martyrdom, we cannot help but hear the tone of concern for those being left behind in his final words and advice to the Church. And the **17th chapter of John** relates Jesus last evening with the disciples, and final his words of encouragement and prayers for His beloved friends as He knowingly approaches the crucifixion.

Though Jesus faces imminent arrest, passion and death in a matter of a few short hours, He doesn’t appear to focus on His ending, but rather displays concern for the welfare of His disciples after his departure.

Our *reading from Acts* occurs at the end of Jesus’ 40 days of post resurrection appearances, in the moments before He ascends to the Father. The disciples seem to have completion on their minds as they ask Jesus, “*Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?*”

“Are you going to finish this all up Lord.” It seems to me that *their expectation or at least their desire is to have Jesus tie everything up in a nice little bow for them. **But where exactly would that leave things?*** As appealing as that sounds, how exactly would that make us whole?

And Peter some 35 years after Jesus’ ascension seems intent on conveying his sense of conviction that God accompanies the church and in the end will bring each of our lives into the fullness of the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In each cases, concern rests with the protection and empowerment of those left after the leave taking.

*Jesus leaves with the **work unfinished, because the work is that for which God has made us.*** The work of being the Kingdom *IS* salvation for God’s people. The restoration of a nation, even Israel, is not the salvation of which Jesus speaks. It is the embrace of loving and being loved, the love Jesus knows in the Father and Spirit. So Jesus tells them that they will receive the Holy Spirit to help them in their work. Jesus wants his followers to know that God will never abandon them, and will send the Holy Spirit to draw them all together in the work of sharing and letting the world know this love.

*An often overlooked aspect of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is that Jesus demonstrates that **we must love others beyond their offense.*** Humanity placed Jesus on the cross, his own friends failed Him, and yet He willingly gave His life for them. Jesus calls us to that depth of love, so that we can be one, knowing that the differences and offense that separate us are nothing compared to the love that binds us together.

Completing the mission isn't the goal, "*that they may be one, as We are one,*" seems to be what Jesus finds important.

Perhaps the point in all this is that God wants our lives to matter, and that comes about when we learn to let other people matter more. Because when that happens, we not only matter to God, but to others, our lives being evermore intertwined, as the Jesus & the Father are one.

The real work of our lives, as John has Jesus remind us constantly, is "*to love one another as we have first been loved.*" ***There is no ending to this work, only the consummation of being endlessly joined together.***

You know, when we drove away from **Bumpy's tearful goodbyes**, we'd always chuckle a bit at his extravagant display, but we'd all quietly smile for the first hour of the long trip knowing that someone loved us that much.

Had I known then, what I know now – how incredibly crucial Bumpy was to making me who I am – I would have told him every time I left him that no matter where I went from that day forward, he would always be with me, whether we ever met again.

Isn't that's really what God wants of us? To know that we are all a part of one another – extricably bound together in the love that created us. Bumpy said it all in his parting words, "*Goodbye. Ya'll take care.*" Because Goodbye comes from the phrase, "*God be with ye.*" And when he said, "*Ya'll take care.*" He meant "***take care of each other when I'm not there to take care of you.***"

AMEN !!!