

Jesus' Farewell Discourses - Part 2

You have heard it said, "**When things get tough, the tough get going**". That is perhaps a short summary of what I believe John is trying to share with us in these chapters of Jesus' Farewell Discourses. The turn of the first century was an incredibly difficult time in politics and religion and his recollection of an earlier time with Jesus is appropriate for then and now. Jesus called his disciples and others to follow him so that God's Realm, that Jesus came to proclaim and demonstrate, would continue when Jesus was no longer here. These chapters reconstruct the wisdom that was imparted by Jesus and offered at the turn of a new century by John.

In the beginning of John's Gospel we saw that Jesus was introduced as the "word" and "verb" of God. Jesus' life was the "complete sentence", if you will, of how we can understand God who is Spirit and, like the wind, cannot be seen but is always felt. Moses, when God called him to go to Pharaoh to free his people asked, "who shall I say sent me", and he was told to say the "I AM" sent him. I am, the verb to be, is what defines God and everything that exists. Jesus, in this Gospel, will speak of himself as "I am", the living word. What we often overlook is that Jesus, in speaking to his followers, also tell them that "you are". As we imitate and follow Jesus we are called to share in visioning God in who "you are".

The whole of chapter 14 is about Jesus' parting gift, "**Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish your fears**". The key to this peace is God's love for us and our willingness to fully share that love with each other and our world. In the previous homily, Part 1 of Jesus' Discourses, Jesus gave us the "new commandment" to love as we are loved by God. This is the primary gift for being the true people of God.

I believe this phrase, "I Am - You Are", is especially valuable as Jesus speaks very personally to his disciples about his future and theirs as his followers. In 14:10 Jesus told Philip, "**I am in the Father, and the Father is in me**" after Jesus said to him, "**If you knew me you would know my Father too. From now on you do know him; you have seen him**". This is confirmed later in chapter 17 in a lengthy prayer to God closing out this portion of

discourse. (17:20-21) "It is not for these alone that I pray, but for those also who through their words put their faith in me. May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." Jesus is reminding his disciples that he was sent by God to announce and establish the Realm of God here on earth so that the fullness of God's way of life will continue to be operative in this world and in each one of us. It is the followers of Jesus and all the people of God who are called to this mission.

To further this divine connection, Jesus uses the example of the Vine in chapter 15. (15:5) "I am the vine; you are the branches. Anyone who dwells in me, as I dwell in you, bears much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." It is here that Jesus makes my point to you clear, I AM the vine; YOU ARE the branches. Jesus declares that everything he does and says is from God who dwells in him. So Jesus wants us to know that we are empowered to continue that function because God is present in us. The allegory of the Vine reminds us to faithfully remain in this interdependent relationship. Those who understand and wish to continue in this Realm of God are to become living "full sentences" in word and deed as followers of Jesus. Before we leave chapter 15, we are promised the full support of the Holy Spirit that will be with us as sons and daughters of God against any detriments or difficulties in this world. (15:26) "When the advocate has come, whom I shall send you from the Father - the Spirit of truth that issues from the Father - he will bear witness to me. And you also are my witnesses, because you have been with me from the first."

In earlier chapters we also recall the allegorical use of "I am - you are". In chapter 8 John tells us that Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; the one who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) Light is amazing and essential to our universe as well as our individual life requirements. The brightness of this gift of light is also our privilege and duty to share with others as followers of Jesus as noted in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to God". "This "light of life" of which Jesus speaks and shares with the world is also our gift, so as not to walk in darkness, and bring this same light to others. Jesus makes this point clearly to his followers - because I AM – YOU ARE.

Next, we hear Jesus saying, "I am the door" (in other translations the word gate is used). It should be clear Jesus used this as a figure of speech, since the scripture tells us: "This figure Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep..... I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:6,7,9). In bidding us to share this same invitation (I AM – YOU ARE) we must also consider that we too are doors or gateways to invite everyone into a living relationship with God.

Jesus used another figure of speech when he said, "I am the good shepherd..." (John 10:11,14) We know that Jesus' father, Joseph, was a carpenter or stone mason, so Jesus was never technically a shepherd. His image of "the good shepherd" was to emphasize his caring concern for humanity. The theme of shepherd, an important and prominent occupation in those days, was the focus of one of that is memorialized in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." This theme reminds us of God's loving and consistent care for all people and is a model of how we should act toward one another. So again the implication is clear, as "I AM – YOU ARE".

We now come to several chapters in which Jesus speaks about himself using the "I Am" in ways that cause this figure of speech to be interpreted literally. In John 10:36 Jesus begins with this question, "Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, "I AM God's Son?" What did Jesus really mean by referring to himself as "I am God's Son"? Perhaps I can clarify this by asking you a similar question; how clearly are you convinced that YOU ARE a child of God? Are we not also, through the words and actions of Jesus, able to claim that we are sons and daughters of God as well? Should we also be accused of blasphemy?

In Jesus' long prayer, recorded in the 17th chapter, there are many words and phrases that express his concern and hope that God would enable us to follow in his example. In verses 6-8, "I made your name known to the people you gave me. They are from this world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me. They did what you told them. 7 Now they know that

everything you gave me comes from you, 8 because I gave them the message that you gave me. They have accepted this message, and they know for sure that I came from you. They have believed that you sent me." A little further in verses 17-19, "Use the truth to make them holy. Your words are truth. 18 I have sent them into the world the same way you sent me into the world. 19 I'm dedicating myself to this holy work I'm doing for them so that they, too, will use the truth to be holy." Toward the end in verses 20 "I'm not praying only for them. I'm also praying for those who will believe in me through their message. 21 I pray that all of these people continue to have unity in the way that you, Father, are in me and I am in you. I pray that they may be united with us so that the world will believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me. I did this so that they are united in the same way we are. 23 I am in them, and you are in me. So they are completely united.

With this inner strength and dignity, Jesus shares his closing thoughts with those who were his disciples. It was in these moments of discourse that Jesus shared his inner hope and strength to enable the disciples, then and now, to be one with God. Now it is our moment to be encouraged by these words in the Gospel of John to be true followers and disciples of Jesus. YOU ARE a child of God, a son and daughter, encouraged TO BE, in word and deed, proclaimers of the Realm of God as announced and demonstrated by Jesus the Christ. In doing so we are blessed and we bring the blessings of God's compassion to everyone around us.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.

Here is a Gospel Song that you may wish to read or sing:

[You can click on this link to hear a choir sing this song]

<http://youtu.be/1TJQxxEa9Os>

1 When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

2 Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will keep singing as the days go by.

3 When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings—wealth can never buy
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

4 So, amid the conflict whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.