

Easter 6  
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

May 17, 2020  
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We have irises along our driveway. There are two sets of them. The standard purple set began blooming a week ago, and they are large and showy, very pretty. Earlier this last week the other set began to bloom. At first, they looked black. Then, as they emerged, they showed themselves to be purple so dark it looks black from a distance. On seeing a picture, our son, Andrew said, "It's like looking into the heart of midnight."

That is on one end of the spectrum. Just down 18th Street from the church there is another set of irises that are white. Their yellow pollen pads stand out against the satiny petals. What is the difference between deep aquamarine and white irises? Well, simply put, EVERYBODY knows that dark irises are prettier than white ones. It's obvious. The white ones are showy and dramatic, but they really have no color at all. They are, in effect, albino flowers, right? Who wants "no color?"

Funny, then, that I can imagine a phone call answered by the grower of white irises. "You never believe what I saw the other day. There are these people on Fowler Place, you know, the cul-de-sac off Fowler Street, they have irises that are BLACK! Who wants a black flower? Black flowers are for funerals."

And there you go—that's the difference between dark and light irises.

Or is it?

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus talks about being one. He says, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Now there are two things about that sentence that are important this morning. First of all, "love" is not a feeling here at all. It means a commitment to, a loyalty to, an investment in, all worked out in action for the good of another. It is what Jesus shows us on the Cross, and that is what he is referring to: self-giving love, action for the good of another.

Then, there is only one commandment in John: "Love one another as I have loved you." So that commitment to, that loyalty to, that action for the good of another as love of Jesus gets worked out in the community of Jesus. And who is in the community of Jesus? Everyone Jesus loved on the Cross—which means pretty much everyone.

Now, I know this is not new stuff for you, but perhaps the next bit is. The effect of this kind of love is that we will be in Jesus, and Jesus will be in the Father, and we all will be one. What does it mean to be "in" Jesus? What does Jesus mean when he says he is "in the Father?" It's recognizing that irises are irises, no matter what the color. The white irises and the dark ones all have iris-ness within. They really are "in" one another. The color of the blooms is secondary to their nature as irises. In the same way, when we love one another as we have been loved, we see that we share something deep within that is common to us all, that great mystery of the glory and pain of being human.

And it goes farther than that. Being human includes something shown us in Jesus. Being human shares something essential with the heart of God. When we know ourselves to be members, one of another, we also know ourselves to be one with God. Where two or three are gathered...

The mystics of the east talk about three stages of spiritual growth:

- Photosis—where the light of truth shines in our hearts,
- Catharsis—where the darkness is burned away by that light,
- Theosis—when we share in the very nature of God.

It all makes sense when we see that WE share in the nature of God—not I or you, or he or she or they, but WE, the beloved community of the created.

So, what does all that talk of irises and mystery have to do with you and me, now? I think we as a society are plagued by a persistent lie. We really do think that our egos are bounded by our skin. We really do believe that we walk around as distinct entities who are walking through life in dialog with other entities. On one level that is true—on the level of white vs. dark irises. It is a necessary concept—useful as long as you recognize that it is limited in its scope. It just doesn't tell the whole story. The lie consists on believing that it is the whole story.

The rest of the story is that beneath and behind that story is another story. It is fundamentally truer than the other story, because it came before it and will outlast it, just as iris rhizomes outlast the blooms. This story does not talk about me and you, we and them, this and that, but WE. It is a fundamental truth of existence that at the core of our being we all share the same source. We are all blossoms born of one rhizome.

This story is also important—fundamentally important, for it is a story only told by the kind of love Jesus had for us, and the kind of love Jesus asks of us for one another. It is a love that sees and acknowledges the differences, but also sees and operates on the basis of a deep commonality. What is good for you is what I will do, for by it I show my humanity, a humanity I share with you, an existence I share with all created things. And so, to do good for you is to do good for all, to love all and to heal all. If we are about a God who is healing and restoring the world, and if we are recipients of and participants in that healing and restoration, then every act of goodness we do sheds healing love into the world, and it will not be done in vain.

And so, we stay socially distant. We wear masks and gloves when appropriate. We stay home as much as possible—or go out into the great outdoors. We do not call on one another, except on the telephone. We love one another.

And we act as we can. We pray, we call one another, we give, we share resources for the good of all, We send texts and messages, and we worship by Zoom. There will come a time when we gather once more in person. Some will feel safe doing so before others, once we are permitted to do so, and that is as it should be. We will continue to offer

online worship as long as is wise—which may be well past the COVID-19 crisis. And when we do gather, we will reaffirm our createdness by touching as is appropriate, sharing the peace and the bread and the wine, sharing our lives, and in doing so, knowing that God is in our midst—we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in the Great Source of All.

But in the meantime, it is a good time to remember that the deeper story, the greater unity, is always the concern of the Church. Plenty of people are caught up in the dualities of we vs. them. In the Church, another story should be told and lived out. We exist to "get close to God," but that consists of first recognizing just how close God is to us. We are one, all of us, and all created things and the ground of that great unity is God. The more we act for the good of the community of the created, the more we are one with God.

And we're in it for the long haul, not just until COVID-19 is controlled, but until the dual world of white vs. dark flowers is subsumed into the one world of irises, and time is swallowed up in eternity.

Meditation questions:

1. Think of someone with whom it is hard to imagine sharing anything at all. What do you have in common after all?
2. What might you do to express that commonality in ways that are healthy, wise and compassionate?
3. How can we build common ground during this pandemic that will outlast it?