

The Rev. Ryan Fischer
St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 14, 2023

Lectionary Year A: John 14:15-21

Lake country folks -- of whom there would be many in this part of Indiana -- can tell when summer is approaching, because, around this time of year, the lakes start drawing people to the area. And for those who are landlocked, summer is surely on its way when they get their first escape from that "land-lock." Common usage speaks of this as a trip to an unnamed place known as the lake. For me, the lake was, in earlier years, Lake of the Woods in far northern Minnesota, back when my parents still had their Winnebago and still joined all our old Drayton friends at KOA on Wheelers Point. As that tradition fell by the way-side, another one took its place -- an annual pilgrimage to Big Turtle Lake, north of Bemidji, Minnesota about ten miles.

Mom and Dad started renting the cabin on Big Turtle back in 1985. Our landlord and landlady were old friends from Grafton, North Dakota, and Mom and the landlady went back to their college years. It was a perfect arrangement for everyone, including the kids. We -- the "kids" -- were all pretty much the same age and enjoyed each other's company. Besides, going to Bemidji meant, for me, going someplace different, as opposed to what could've been a pretty dull summer routine of riding my bike in circles around our North Fargo neighborhood. I never got tired of going to the lake -- heck, I was a kid and my only duty was to have fun!

And fun I had -- in the water or on the boat or making a little town in the driveway sand with the landlord's kids. I'd say that, for an easily-entertained

twelve-year-old like myself, it was about the most enjoyable place I could've possibly been at the time.

Predictably, though, things started to change. (Camelot never lasts forever, right?) By high school, I had more to do during the summer -- music camp, odd jobs, the ever-earlier start of football practice (I was the waterboy, mind you). Then, we "kids" grew up and started new lives; I went to college and held down a variety of summer jobs, both of which eased lake-going out of the picture, though my parents continued to go. And, most devastatingly, our landlord died of cancer in 1993. Without the constant presence of his activity-directing and encouragement, the lake lost much of its appeal. It seemed unsettlingly quiet and desolate -- the antithesis of the "fun" I remembered from less than a decade earlier.

Spring forward a lot of years to today, though, and I can see that the new always takes the place of the old, which gives me an inkling of hope. Now my summers are filled with car shows and new friends and the occasional invite aboard someone's boat locally (yes, there's still water in the picture!). It's really more about presence than it is place. The presence of friends and family and good times ultimately means more than the actual place in which it happens. I hope that, as a church, we're acutely aware of this insofar as we know deep down that we are not our building, but that we are us -- the Body of Christ, wherever we are. The church's presence -- in Word, Sacrament, and Christian community -- remains no matter what!

Jesus has some mighty strong words to that effect, too. He knew he wasn't going to be around in the same form forever, and, naturally, that would be a source of anxiety and pain for his remaining friends. So he says, "I will not leave you

orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:18-20).

So, while we, as humans, get hung up on the physical -- place and person, particularly -- Jesus is challenging us, along with the disciples, to realize that whatever "absence" we feel is not really absence. It is, indeed, presence, albeit in a different way or form. Just as I can enjoy a summer afternoon someplace other than Big Turtle Lake, so too can we, as Christians, enjoy the presence of the Lord wherever we (or he) may be. As he promised, he will be with us, and, more profoundly, in us. Physical things -- places and persons -- are immaterial in light of that which truly is. What is is, in this case, the intangible -- the sense, the feeling, the knowledge, and the understanding that you are with the One who offered his life for you...and, most of all, that he is in you.

And that is the assurance that Jesus gives us in the midst of whatever "death" we suffer -- whether it be the loss of a beloved place or even a good friend. There is an Easter promise meeting us around every corner, because the resurrection once again makes real the presence of an Eternal and Living God. "Because I live," Jesus says, "you also will live." That life for us means that our Lord will continue to give us signs of hope amid pain, grief, and loss. And something new will always take the place of the old -- perhaps not a "replacement" in the traditional sense, but you'll recognize it when you encounter it.

Trust me. Remember, it's all about presence and not place! Our Lord prefers not to stand still -- the same goes for his promise.

I remember when, many years ago, Mom told me that she and Dad would not be rent-

ing the cabin after twenty-five summers. The chore of getting there and back wasn't worth it anymore, and it was particularly clear that Dad's ever-progressing Parkinson's disease was making the cabin's quaint but precarious location increasingly difficult to negotiate. Not long after that, our landlady sold the entire property. But when Mom shared the news that the cabin-renting days were through, I simply said, "Well, twenty-five years isn't a bad run."

Even for Camelot...

But while Camelots come and go, God's promise remains. And it doesn't seem too farfetched to think that his blessings of life, love, family, friends, and joy -- along with lakes and streams -- are as eternal as creation itself. Wherever we are, those blessings will be.

Amen.