

## Seventh Sunday of Easter 2006

**Texts:** John 17:6-19  
1 John 5:9-13

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BEaster/bEaster7.htm>

### John 17:6-19

This passage comes near the conclusion of the long speech by Jesus as he shares his last meal with his followers. Themes of glory, protection, unity, joy, etc. are touched on again, particularly with a stress on assurance for his followers who are being sent into the world as he is no longer of the world.

### 1 John 5:9-13

Again, a passage near a conclusion, and again there is a note of assurance that you may know you have eternal life.

### Sermon in a Nut Shell

We are human. We are frail and messed up and make mistakes and are unaware of how we affect others. But when the spirit of Jesus calls us to love as he has loved us, we know that there is something powerful and healthy and fecund in that call. And because he calls us not just to love, but to love as he has loved us, we have before us a profound and powerful true love.

Jesus does not ask us to love as he loves. He asks us to love as we have been loved. We are not to try and be a little, imperfect, Jesus. We are asked to let live a healed and transformed and fully alive spirit that is already within. And to do that together – as one – with each other, just as Jesus has only done what he has done, as one with the Father. It is the relationships – the quality of the relationships – that is crucial.

### Sermon Thoughts (Not the Sermon)

## DaVinci and the Secret of John

(Note: I scrapped my original sermon preparation after the bulletin with the sermon title, “Natalistic” Not Fatalistic, had been printed. What follows is more or less a summary of the actual sermon.)

I can give you a clue to understanding the titles of my sermons: the fancier they are, the least sure I am about what the sermon actually will be.

And after working away at this John 17 text for a while, I finally admitted defeat and decided to go and see the DaVinci Code instead. I hadn't read the book, but I figured there was no way it could be more confusing than the John 17 passage we heard this morning. In fact, listening to that passage helps to understand why – from the very beginning – there have always been those who have speculated about “codes” and “conspiracies” that are hidden in the bible.

I was somewhat surprised to learn from Dan Brown's DaVinci Code that one of the secrets the church has been trying to hide from common knowledge is that ... Jesus was human!

Now you should know, that back in the first centuries following the death of Jesus there was a great deal of debate about whether Jesus was really an ordinary human like you and me, or only a spirit who appeared in human form. The group that “won” this debate are the ones we follow, and they declared that Jesus was fully human. And. Was also a person of the Holy Trinity. Fully human and fully divine.

And you should know that there were lots of writings at the time the various Biblical gospels and letters were being written. And part of the heated debates in the second and third centuries was which of these were reputable and should be included in the “official” Bible of the church; and which should not. There was considerable debate about the Gospel of John because, for example, when Jesus says in John 17, “I am not of this world,” does that mean Jesus is not human? Does it mean, “I am a spirit not of this human world?” You can see why the church which was concerned about affirming the humanity of Jesus would have some questions about John.

Now this winning side, did set out to destroy all the writings of the losing side; which of course just has the undesirable consequence of fueling charges of “cover ups” and of hidden, secret, and “true” meanings of Jesus that the Church doesn’t want you to know.

And you should also know that from the very beginning, there were rumors and speculations about just how human was Jesus? Was he human enough to fall in love? Human enough to get married? Human enough to make love? Have children? And just how close was he to Mary Magdalene? She is portrayed in the gospels as having – what in Jesus’ own time – could only be described as a shocking familiarity with him. And she is the first to meet the risen Christ, and the first to witness to the good news: “I have seen the Lord.” And you should also know that there is a gospel attributed to her which places her as a prominent apostle.

So Dan Brown is not the first – and will not be the last – to “discover” – seemingly but not actually “for the first time” – “hidden” secrets and “codes.”

Which brings me back to John 17. Just what are we to make of this passage? Let’s begin by assuming there are no secret codes or hidden meanings.

John was someone who was not concerned about Jesus’ humanity. If we could simplify the doctrine of the Trinity to say that Jesus was fully a human man who also reveals the full glory of God, then we can say that John’s focus is on the glory of God. John wants us to see – not the human person of Jesus – he wants us to see the full glory of God that was in Jesus.

And so we hear in John over and over again: I am in the Father, the Father is in me. I am in you, you are in me. I love you as the Father loves me; love one another as I have loved you. I am the truth and I have told you all that the Father has told me. I have come that you may be one as the Father and I are one. I have come that my joy may be in you. ... Do you notice a theme here? Hear a pattern?

I think the reason John’s writing is so difficult is because he trying to describe a truth that is so unimaginable, so ineffable, that words are literally failing him. He has seen the glory of God in Jesus and is left speechless, but must speak because he wants us to also know and experience this truth. And so he babbles and repeats himself.

But his words also evoke a truth that already resides in us. They speak to the truth in us that there is more in us than simply our human birth and life. We sense a “something more” that can only be described as “spirit.” And the spirit in us responds to the spirit in Jesus because he lifts up the possibility of a new way to live. A fuller way to live.

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has only done what he has done, as one with the Father. It is the relationships – the quality of the relationships – that is crucial.

So perhaps the key for us today is to hear John calling us to be together in community. To echo in human form the community of the Trinity, and to show the world the powerful, healthy, fecund love that loves us. To assist the spirit in each of us to hear and respond to the call of the spirit in Christ. May it be so. Amen.