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John 14:1-14
Acts 7:55-60
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16
1 Peter 2:2-10

May 10, 2020
The Fifth Sunday of Easter

The bees have arrived! I wanted to begin this morning with a short slide show so that you can see what we have been up to at the church.

Near our garden, we have installed 2 hives. And...I'm thankful to Hollis and Camden for being eager participants in the process this week. Together, we transported our new bee colonies from Scottsville to Goochland and transferred them to their new homes.

Here's a bit of trivia for you...the modern day hive that you see in the pictures was created by a clergyman, Rev. Lorenzo Langstroth in the mid 1800's. It is said that he started beekeeping during a time in his life that he was experiencing deep loneliness and depression and that working with bees became a source of solace for him. His search for solace in nature seems timely to our own situations we find ourselves in today as we continue this path of quarantine.

Many beekeepers will tell you that the process of keeping bees is at its heart a spiritual endeavor, a meditation with nature, a process of presence. You can't work with bees if you are stressed or agitated. You can't rush or demand your own way. Bee keeping requires that you stay calm, mindful of how your actions will affect the whole community. It requires that you work with the bees and support them so that they may thrive. It is said that every hive has its own personality and as you get to know your bees, you begin to understand their unique needs and you begin to learn their particular rhythm of life.

If you look into a hive you will see a beautifully interwoven system of communication and commitment. Now...for some general background...There are three types of bees found in the hive...the workers, the drones and of course, the queen who guides the entire community. The workers and the drones have one objective...to support the queen. The drones have it easy...they are there to do one thing...to mate with the queen. The drones are there strictly to mate with the queen. It's a straight forward job.

But...the workers are fascinating. From the time she is born (all workers are female by the way), she will do every job in the hive throughout her lifetime. When she is born, she starts to immediately focus on the necessities. She cleans up after herself. Then, she begins to help the larvae as they hatch. The worker will then begin cleaning other parts of the hive. She will make wax and help feed other bees. Finally, she will embark upon the job of pollinating and bringing back food for herself and others. It is a powerful example of a lifetime of service to her community. Unselfish and dedicated.

Here's one final bit of trivia...No bee can live alone...they have to be in community. These are not solitary insects. Their life is dependent upon the well-being of the whole.

It's a message we all need to be reminded of right now. None of us are meant to live alone and none of us are accountable only to ourselves.

Martin Luther in his catechism on the 10 commandments states it this way, "We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need."

The beehive runs under this same premise. In service to the queen, the bees work to ensure that no other bee is left to fend for themselves and they dedicate their life to support the physical needs of the hive as a whole.

So the big question...what do bees have to do with our lives? Let me share two lessons that I think could benefit us all.

The first lesson I want us to consider is from our Psalm, verse 15 & 16...*"My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love."* It's a simple yet challenging directive. When things are difficult, when you are scared, when you are broken and hurting and confused...remember that you are not to live a life alone. You are God's and God has given you a community of people around you to support and care for you. Your life is held lovingly by God and in response to that love, we lovingly hold one another in our own hands. That's the lesson of the bee community. ***Take care of one another and remember whose you are.***

The second lesson is from our Gospel reading when Jesus says to his disciples...*In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.* And then he tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them. Now we often hear this as a portrayal of after life in heaven...of the place that is being prepared for us in some future time when we pass from this life. That is certainly one way to read this passage.

But we also know that God calls upon us to help bring the kingdom of heaven to earth today, in the present. It's in how we provide for the hungry, comfort the sick, stand up for the oppressed. It's in how we forgive and in how we love. It's cultivating a servant's heart and using our gifts to bring the love of God to fruition in this tired and broken world. That means those dwelling places that are being cultivated into those many rooms require that we do some cultivating of our own. The bee's lesson? ***Work to make sure everyone has a secure place to thrive.***

Remember Martin Luther's words...*"We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need."*

So, let me ask you to consider this...

What would that look like if we created a dwelling place where everyone had a job and could provide for their family?

What would that look like if we created a dwelling place where the abused woman could safely break free from her situation without fear of retribution?

What would that look like if we created a dwelling place where all children could learn in safety, free from violence or drugs or poverty?

What would that look like if we created a dwelling place where hatred and racism were abolished and were replaced with justice and respect and equality?

Here's how these questions hit home for me this week...

On Friday, Camden came into my room with tears streaming down his face after watching the video of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery. He didn't realize the video he was clicking on was of the actual killing. He sat beside me and cried...so confused. He kept asking..."Mom, why would anyone do this to someone? He was just running." In other words, where was his safe dwelling place? Who was watching out for him?

I have been left to consider (and maybe you have too)...how do we explain to our kids that in reality the world doesn't have enough dwelling places? How do we tell them that our communities haven't done all that we can do to not hurt or harm our neighbor? How do we tell them that we have not done all that we can do to help and support one another in all of our physical needs?

But the Good News is that we can do better. We can work to build those dwelling places and insure that the Kingdom of God is fully present and that no one has to live in fear or scarcity. No one has to fear for their life. No child has to go hungry. No person has to be abused or oppressed or discriminated against.

Because...God gave us a community of people so that together we may work for the greater good...the greater good that is not just reserved for a lucky, privileged few but that is available for each and every one of God's beloved.

One thing struck me as we transferred our bees to their new homes. Once the queen was in place and the hive cover put on, all of the bees that were left outside quickly made their way into the hive. They reoriented around a common purpose. They knew their job and they got to work...caring for their community, working tirelessly to feed and protect the well-being of their entire hive. The lesson from the hive?

Jesus shows us the way. All we need to do is follow and get to work. Amen.