

John 15:9-17  
Out on the Roof  
Delivered May 17, 2009

Our scripture passage this morning is part of Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples. In the book of John, as opposed to the other gospel narratives, a wise Jesus has it all figured out. He knows he is going to be crucified and resurrected, and he knows that all of this is part of God's plan. The only thing he doesn't know is when he will return to the earth. Will it be a couple of days, a year, 500 years, or more? Since it might be a long, long time, Jesus decides he must prepare the disciples. He tells them he's going to be leaving them. Then, he gives them some instructions about what they are to do in his absence—you might call them collectively, Jesus' little instruction booklet. Although, it's not LITTLE. In my study Bible these instructions run on for several pages—long enough for one commentator to remark, “Wordy is the lamb.”

Now here you might wonder, as I did, “Why are we reading these instructions today--AFTER Jesus death?” Certainly if we stick to the chronology of the events in the Bible, these should be read BEFORE Good Friday, in other words, before Jesus' death. The reason I think, is because now, six weeks after Easter, we have had time to reflect on Jesus' death and resurrection. We have had some time to establish an after-resurrection routine. The Easter lilies left long ago. Certainly we've put away our Easter hymns. In another week, the white pulpit cloth will go back into the closet where it will stay, barring weddings and funerals, until Christmas morning. But are we doing what we are supposed to be doing in this post resurrection time? Has Christ's death and resurrection made the impact it was supposed to make on us? Reading from Jesus' little instruction booklet, then, is kind of like a 30,000 mile check up for us. We lift up our internal hoods and check the carburetor, the fan belt and the oil. After our check up, we can either pat ourselves on the back confident that we are doing everything Jesus says we should be doing, or we can make adjustments to our lives, so that we are more in line with what Jesus expects of us.

Before we delve into what Jesus has to say to us, though, we need to return to a before-crucifixion mind set. We need to ask ourselves, “What was it those first century disciples were feeling when Jesus lays it on them, “I'm leaving and you won't be going with me?”

I tried to think of a similar situation that is in line with what we have experienced in our own lives. I think the disciples must have felt about Jesus' leaving the way we felt when our parents left us home alone for the first time. You know, you're an adolescent. Part of you thinks it is way cool, for you to be in charge of the house, all by yourself. You're getting some independence, finally. But part of you is also very worried. Will you be able to handle this? You get even more worried when your parents give you phone numbers—“Ok. Here's the number where we'll be. You just call us if anything happens.” Then they give you the phone number for the fire department and the police department—since for most of us, back when we were adolescents, there was no such thing as a 911. They also give you the number for the grandparents, who in my case

lived in Sadieville, Kentucky and we lived in Richmond, Virginia—like how are grandparents living in Sadieville Kentucky going to help if the house is on fire or if the pipes burst? And finally, they give you the number of the next door neighbor.

Then you walk your parents to the front door and they say, “Don’t forget to lock the door behind us.” Why do you need to do that? Do they know something you don’t? Is there someone lurking out there, waiting to get in? You see already, they’ve put ideas into your head.

After you hear them drive off, you don’t know what to do. You think you should do something adultish—and maybe a tad risky—like pop some popcorn, maybe. Cooking is an adult thing to do and it COULD lead to a fire—that’s the risky part. Or maybe you decide to do another adultish and risky thing—maybe take the dog for a walk. I mean, leaving the house, having to unlock and then relock the door. That’s adultish. And talk about risk! There’s the possibility the dog could get loose and then you would have to run all over the neighborhood chasing him down.

Probably, though, if you’re like me, and not so much the risk taker, you decide NOT to pop popcorn and you decide NOT to walk the dog. You just sit on the family room couch and think about how mature you are. Maybe you watch some television. The first time I stayed home while my folks went out, that’s what I did. Watched television.

Everything was fine, too, until it started to storm. There was lightning and thunder, like in a horror movie. Even though I can’t remember what time of year my folks left me home alone for the first time, I DO know that the pipes in the house rattled and banged and knocked. We had hot water heat registers and they did that when the heat was on in the house. What I am saying is, it was a noisy night and that probably helped to set me on edge. Then, I started imagining that there was someone in the house with me. I heard creaks and groans, like footfalls on old wood floors—the kind of floors we had in our house. From imagining that there was a stranger in the house, it was a short jump to imagining that the someone in the house was a burglar. That’s not so farfetched, really. Just so you know, I read this week that this year one in six homes will be burglarized. A burglary takes place every 12 seconds. Why not my house—one of the one in six?

I worried and fretted and watched the clock. It was getting late. The storm passed but there was a fine drizzle outside. STILL my folks weren’t home. I could have phoned them, of course, and told them to skip dessert and come back, but I didn’t want to admit that their daughter was not grown up enough yet, to stay in the house by herself. Finally, I decided to go upstairs to my bedroom. I thought to myself, “I’ll just go to sleep and in the morning, my parents will be back and everything will be ok.”

**Except.** Except once I was in bed, the creaks and groans got even **louder**. How long would it be before the burglar decided to check out the bedrooms and find me? Now here you should know that my bedroom window looked out over our slightly sloping porch roof. I thought to myself, “If I climb out on the porch roof, the burglar won’t be

able to find me and kill me.” That is what I did. Wrapped in my fuzzy pink robe (because my raincoat was in the downstairs hall closet and I didn’t want to disturb the burglar), I climbed out on the porch roof. I stayed out there in the cold and drizzle until my folks came home. They walked through the house calling my name, and I opened the window and climbed back in and there they were standing in my room, looking at a very cold and drippy me. It was humiliating to find out that no one but the three of us was in the house and nothing had been stolen.

That’s a little bit like what the disciples must have been experiencing, except for the last part about the humiliation of having to crawl back into the house..

Probably some of them were supremely nervous about having the kingdom left to their care. Others, though, may have been conflicted. Oh, they were sad to hear about Jesus’ leaving, but they saw his departure as an opportunity to call the shots—to be in charge. So you had some disciples eager to prove their mustard; others were content to just stay inside and watch TV or go to bed. Then maybe there were a paranoid few who had lost perspective altogether. Even the idea that Jesus might leave them was enough to send them to their rooftops to wait for Jesus’ return.

Jesus needed to give them a better option. Something that would bring them together. He needed to give them a focus, a goal. So, instead of giving them a bunch of phone numbers that would only raise their anxiety level; instead of telling them to lock the doors and windows, and pull down the shades-- Jesus tells them. “You know what I want you to do? After I’m gone and you’re lonely and scared, I want you to throw a party.” Which is something a parent would probably never tell a child when a parent is about to leave the house, but then again, the disciples weren’t REALLY children. Jesus says, “When I’ve gone, throw a party and invite all your friends and your friends, friends. Invite people in the street you don’t even know. Then, I want you to love your friends. The people you don’t know I want you to make into friends, and then I want you to love them, too. And finally, I want you to teach your new friends and your old friends about me, and they will love me, and I will love them.” Jesus really knew how to turn a lemon into lemonade, didn’t he?

The party, it turns out, was a huge success. Maybe it stormed outside. Maybe the floors creaked and the pipes banged, but no one could hear them for all the talking and laughing and carrying on. In fact, just look around. The party was such a success that it’s still going on. I’d say that in this post Easter check up test, we all deserve A’s.  
Amen