

An Embraceable Variant: New England Annual Conference

John 17: 3

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1. Summit

High atop the world's greatest writings there sits our Holy Scripture. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is high. We cannot attain it.

Within the Scripture itself are conjoined the sibling testaments, the older and newer, the Hebrew Scripture and the Christian Writings. For us just now, the 27 newer books stand a little bit higher.

The Gospels and the Letters and the Apocalyptic Writings are all inspired and inspiring, all sufficient for faith and practice. The gospels though have a certain priority, in our liturgy, and in our hearts. They lie just a step or two higher, atop higher ground.

You love all the Gospels. One there is though which from antiquity has been known as the sublime, the spiritual gospel. We shall ascend today to the craggy paths and rarified air of the Fourth Gospel.

High above the rest of John, above the seven signs to begin and above the passion and resurrection to end, there lies the strangest moonscape in the Scripture, and so in all literature, and so in life. I mean chapters 13-17. We are about to place our homiletical flag on the very summit, the highest of high peaks, the textual Matterhorn, Everest, Mount Washington, Pike's Peak: John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (Thrice repeat).

*2. Where We Least Expect To Find It: Freedom In Disappointment,
Grace In Dislocation, Love In Departure: John*

Your own participation in this study is cordially invited, and fully required today. We affirm, with the ancient Gospel according to St. John the Divine 17:3, that we find freedom in disappointment, we grasp grace in

dislocation, and we learn love in departure. Look back at all your experience to date. What is your greatest disappointment? It is a clue to freedom. What is your hardest dislocation? It is a signpost for grace. What is your most grievous departure? It is the way of love.

The community of the beloved disciple knew about disappointment. After three generations, and some, the community had awaited the primitive hope of the church to be realized. They awaited the return of Christ. The resurrection of the dead from their graves. The end of time. The apocalypse of God. It did not come. He did not come, at least not in the way once hoped. I find it the most remarkable feature of the New Testament that John, rather than being lost in a sea of disheartening failure, in the very eye of his most stormy theological hurricane, found freedom. In theological disappointment he found freedom.

In our time, speaking of theological disappointment, we are bidding a reluctant farewell to God. To a certain, junior, perception of God. God reigns. This we affirm with the church militant and triumphant. But God's way among us is away from us. He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. And you?

The community of the beloved disciple knew about dislocation. They had lost their family of origin. They were sent out from their mother religion. The church that wrote John had been thrown out of the synagogue. The life they grew up with had cast them out. It took three generations for them to grasp the joyful grace in dislocation. Count it all grace, brethren, when various dislocations beset you!

In our time we have also known sociological dislocation aplenty. Children bear the brunt of unemployment in the home, for instance. A certain sense of civic self was dislodged, here in Boston, this year, for instance. And you?

The community of the beloved disciple knew about departure. The layers of grief culminating in chapter 17, while ostensibly a rehearsal of Jesus' own departure, may also have been crafted by the heart and voice of their aged John, the other and beloved disciple, whose own departure, in the midst of disappointment and dislocation, itself provoked these layers of grief. Is it not ironic that the sharpest, most rarified language of love in all of the New Testament—in all of literature—arises in the hour of departure?

In our time, as has every generation, we face the departure of persons and groups. ‘Nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love’ (Bonhoeffer). The departure of the Christ makes space for love. As I have loved you, so you also ought to love one another. ‘Be yourself, but be your best self, dare to be different and to follow your own star.’ You snowflake, you. And you?

The measures of freedom and grace given to us become real possibilities, real freedom and real grace, only when we have the gracious freedom to decide for faith. The same is magnificently true of love. This is the message of John, at the end.

But how does this happen? Freedom, grace and love come through variance, in John, difference, in John, the courage to act differently, think differently, in John. Let me see if an analogy will help.

3. Brother John

We are four siblings in my family of origin. The older three have brown hair. The youngest is a redhead, whose name is John. John’s bright red locks are unlike, quite unlike, the less remarkable curls of Bob, Cathy and Cynthia. He stands apart, does John. It makes you wonder where he came from, with such a distinctive aspect. John is like his Gospel namesake, the Fourth Gospel. The youngest of the four, he stands out, so different from his synoptic siblings Matthew, Mark and Luke. They with their shared brown hair, their shared parables and teachings, their shared emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, their shared trips from Galilee to Jerusalem, they just don’t look at all like their younger redheaded brother.

In the summer, it happens, as it may in your family, there is a family reunion for one part of our tribe. Occasionally, we would go, growing up. Like yours, ours is something of standard reunion. It is held on a farm near Albany, which has been in the family since before George Washington rode a horse. After the usual light meal of beef, corn, potatoes, bread, sausage, pies, and pickles and so on, the extended family (or those who having eaten so can still move) will sometimes stand for a photograph on the long farm house veranda. I ask you to look at the photo. I am holding it here. Can you see it? Well, even if you cannot see it across the radio waves, you can probably guess what it shows. Of these eighty people, do you see how many have red hair? About 60—young or old, tall or short, heavy or slight, male

or female, they mostly have red hair, like John. 75% are redheads. In fact, in the photo, it looks like a sea of red hair. Maybe a red heads convention out in the farm fields of Cooperstown, NY. John isn't the odd ball. His siblings are.

John is not the second century Greco Roman odd ball. His synoptic siblings are. When you put the Fourth Gospel, with all its red haired radical difference, on the farm house veranda of second century religious family literature, he fits right in. He stands shoulder to shoulder with all the Gnostic writings that are so like him, especially in these late chapters. It looks like a redheads convention. He looks and sounds quite like the rest of his second and third cousins, once or twice removed: The Paraphrase of Shem, the Treatise on the Resurrection, the Odes of Solomon, the Apocryphon of John, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Mary. How else will we ever hear this voice of Jesus from John 17?

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom though hast sent.

Six Synoptic differences! Eternal life, not kingdom of heaven. Know, not believe. The only true God, not Abba. Jesus Christ, not Rabbi or Master. Sent, not begotten.

This voice is NOTHING like that of the Sermon on the Mount, or that of the parable of the Good Samaritan, or that of the cry from Psalm 22 on the cross. Not human, but divine, here. Not earthly, but heavenly, here. Not low, but high, here. Not immanent, but transcendent, here.

The community of the Gospel of John had a radical experience of Jesus, as God on earth. To render that experience meaningful, they had the radical courage to take language from the heretics around them, the Gnostics, and use it as their own BECAUSE IT FIT. It worked. It explained to the huddled humans clinging to Christ what they had experienced in him: divine grace and divine freedom. It rendered the sense of consecration, the sense of holy living and dying, the sense of consecrated joy, which they had found, with the Light of the World, with the Bread of Life, with the Good Shepherd, with the Resurrection, with the Word made flesh.

The community of the Gospel of John feared not the culture around them. They feared not truth, even when that truth was best expressed outside of their particular religious circle. They had the guts to use language belonging to pagans, outsiders, heretics, Gnostics to celebrate and consecrate

their faith. In doing so, they opened up the church to the world, to the future, to the culture around them. They changed their way of speaking of Christ, and pointed to Christ above, in, and transforming the culture around them. They changed. They had the courage to change.

In age, our own, when the Gospel of John, served raw, without cooking, without historical interpretation, can be made to sound like the voice not of tradition but of traditionalism, we do well to remember John's courage to change, to reach out to the culture around, to put the gospel in word and music on the air waves of a pagan culture, out on the radio waves of a secular world, and where possible to use that same culture.

Raymond Brown: *'Some scholars may ponder on the luck of the Beloved Disciple that his community's Gospel was not recognized for the sectarian tractate that it really was. But others among us will see this as a recognition by Apostolic Christians that the Johannine language was not really a riddle and the Johannine voice was not alien...What the Johannine Christians considered to be a tradition that had come down from Jesus seems to have been accepted by many other Christians as an embraceable variant of the tradition that they had from Jesus'*. (TCOTBD, 18)

4. Where We Least Expect To Find It: Freedom In Disappointment, Grace In Dislocation, Love In Departure: Today

Freedom

A poor man went to a Methodist church for worship. The congregation welcomed him and he returned week by week. After a while the women's circle took up a collection and bought him a nice new suit, with a blue tie. He happily received the gift, but they never saw him in church again.

A while later, on the street, one of church members saw him and asked what had happened. Did he not like the suit? Did it not fit? Was he afraid to wear it?

"Oh no, I love the suit. I look great in it. When I say myself in the mirror, I looked so good I thought, 'I look like a million bucks. I look too good to go just to the Methodist church. I think I'm dressed well enough to

go the Episcopal church. I think I will go there. And that is what I did". Disappointment led to freedom!

Some years ago we sat at dinner with several other couples, in a beautiful home, over a majestic meal, graciously served. Because the couples new each other well, and were in trust to each other, there was the chance for hard and serious conversation, consecrated conversation you might say. This evening the debate swirled around gay marriage.

There are tipping points in the way a culture moves. Some of them occur at dinner, in beautiful homes, over majestic meals, graciously served. The host was opposed, to gay marriage that is. The conversation widened, and then narrowed, and then widened again. We can surely agree that there are many ways of keeping faith, and many honest, different, points of view, on this and on many issues.

Across the table sat Carol, mother of two fine teenagers, married with joy to a business leader, baseball player, Red Sox fan. She had battled cancer once before, and now it returned, and she fought it again. We could not see it then, but in seven months she was gone.

Over some heat and some laughter, much disagreement but little discord, the conversation, consecrated you might say, moved on. Carol spoke fully, and at one point said: 'You know, I have learned how precious life is, how fragile, what a gift every day is. Here is what I feel: if two people truly love each other, deeply commit to each other, and want to consecrate their vows, that is they want what Doug and I have, why would I ever want to stand in their way, why would I ever want to deprive them of that happiness that I know so well.' I heard some minds changing as the dessert came out. The embodiment of the embraceable variant.

Pasternak loved Shakespeare's Sonnett 66. It is said that whenever he read aloud the crowd would not let him leave until he had rehearsed it for them. "Give us the 66th..." Its evocation of daily anxiety bears remembering. The poem is unequalled in its announcement of disappointment, but also of freedom to wrestle with it. When life gives you the 66th remember Shakespeare, but especially his last couplet.

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,

*As to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,*

*And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly--doctor-like--controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.*

‘Captive good attending captain ill...’ Can you hear that? It begs to be heard. Stand with your people in tragedy, honest and kind in word and deed.

Grace

Our churches are in the throes of dislocation. Lyle Schaller had our number 25 years ago when he said: “These denominations will gladly accept 2-3% annual decline in exchange for the tacit agreement that there be no significant change”. And so, in 25 years, in the Northeast, United Methodism has lost 50% of its membership. Today more than 600 of the 930 pulpits in my home conference, Upper New York, are occupied by non-elders: the preaching and ministry are done by people without full or proper education, preparation, examination or ordination. In what other sector of serious life would we permit this?

Sometimes a dose of realized eschatology can clear the mind and strengthen the soul. In a way, every day is our last. In a way, heaven and hell are here and now. In a way, the end time is all of time. John puts it this way: ‘the hour is coming AND NOW IS’.

The freedom of the gospel has gradually embraced multiple variants. The poor. The immigrant. People of color. Those once enslaved. Women. Gay people. Others. The Other. In fact, the lesson of the gospel of grace enshrined in John is the spiritual expansion of grace, through the throes of dislocation, found in the embrace of the embraceable variant.

In grace, our healthy future will come from a resurrection of thought, word and deed: of traditional worship, of traveling elders who excel in preaching, and in tithing to support the church we love.

I bear witness: All of the lastingly good features of my life have come through grace in dislocation: name in baptism, faith in confirmation, community in eucharist, partnership in marriage, work in ordination, love in pardon, and hope in Christ for this life and the next. All these are found in the healthy life of healthy, vibrant, discreet communities of faith. In our dislocation we discover grace, an embraceable variant, which makes all the difference. Our New England poet had it right:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Love

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. (James 5: 1) While we may shed the inherited demonic mythology in the verse, knowing and honoring its origins in the distant past, we nonetheless fully recognize the spiritual truth here: we know not what a day may bring, but only that the hour for serving is always present. 1 John 4: 7-12 captures love divinely: *Beloved let us love one another...*

New occasions teach new duties

*Time makes ancient good uncouth
One must upward still and onward
Who would keep abreast of truth*

We too want to discipline ourselves and keep alert. So we pray. Do you pray? So we commune. Do you receive the eucharist? So we study. Have you devotionally read your Bible this week? So we converse with one another. Have you opened home and heart recently in Christian conversation? So we fast—park your car, save your money, do not reply all: fight pollution, debt and dehumanization. We too want to discipline ourselves and keep alert.

When we buried Lu Lingzi, last month, her family bowed, ceremonially, and from the waist, at the very close of the service, a recognition of real love in real departure.

*O LORD, thou hast searched me and known me!
Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my
thoughts from afar.
Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all
my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it
altogether.
Thou dost beset me behind and before, and layest thy hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.
Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy
presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art
there!
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the
sea,
even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to thee, the night is bright as the day; for
darkness is as light with Thee.*

Sursum corda! Lift up your hearts. The variance, your distinctive self is utterly embraceable. That variance, and your courage to live it, bring saving wholeness. There is a clue to Freedom in disappointment. There is a signpost to Grace in dislocation. There is a way of Love in departure.

This is eternal life, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

5. A Johannine Inspiration; I John 4: 7-12

John is the ‘spiritual gospel’. The gospel and the letters named for John, including our lesson read earlier, were given their shared name long ago. So named in the second century by a person whom once we termed a ‘church father’ but term such an one such no longer, rather saying an ‘early Christian writer’, the Johannine literature has long inspired poetry.

From the doors on the Marsh Plaza emerge every spring a class of soon to be preachers, holding Bibles in their right hands and massive debt in their left. By July 1 they are in pulpits, preaching, preaching every Sunday a Sunday sermon, ‘about God and about 20 minutes’, for forty years. Some of those sermons will come from John.

Come Saturday night they will begin to write their sermons. They will find in the passages to be read from John various troubling, troublesome, troublous passages. It is a diachronic reading of John, one that looks at its place and time, its community of origin, its *sitz im leben*, or life setting, which frees, and which alone can give a measure of the promise of 8:32, ‘you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free’. Coming down from the STH steps, Bible in one hand and massive debt in the other, our students, one hopes, will also have acquired some pious understanding of John’s history and theology.

They will have learned that the phrase ‘the Jews’ does not mean ‘the Jews’, but grew up in the year 90ad out of a painful separation of Christian Jews from Jewish Christians. The community behind John contested with those whom they referred by this phrase, even though they, the Jews, were their own kin. They themselves were Jews too! *These passages in John are to be understood historically and theologically as a particularly dark moment in the Christian tradition of anti-semitism.* Our students need to know this first, and more.

John’s Jesus makes several remarkable claims, given Philipians 2 and Matthew 5. Are many of them historically reliable? No. They reflect a changed understanding of the Christ, hard won and hard earned. The titles for Christ—Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man—come from different points in the

community's journey, history, and theology. Our students need to know this first, and more.

John's community has suffered trauma that has caused change. Trauma brings change. They have suffered the trauma of disappointment. The end of the world which they expected did not come, disappointingly enough. They found the courage to admit it, and change. That is, in disappointment they discovered freedom. They also have suffered the trauma of dislocation. They have been thrown out of their religious home, de-synagogued if you will, and are wandering out in the street when they write. They lost their mother tongue, mother land, mother tradition, which is huge dislocation. They found the courage to face it, and change. That is, in dislocation they discovered grace. Paul, who did not write or know John, might well have said, see, I told you, 'when I am weak, then I am strong'. And, *mirabile dictu*, in the cross of Christ and in the loss of John, this ancient faith community uncovered a way to love. Our students need to know this first, and more.

However. Don't you know that life is a funny old dog? For six years I had along side me as teaching assistant a most brilliant, funny, young mother of two, Episcopal priest. She is a literary critic. She practices rhetorical criticism. She loves poetry. Twice a term I ask her to bring her exotic medicines, the alchemic mixtures of literary criticism to bear on our text. I like to be magnanimous, don't you know. I believe in the liberal balance, don't you know. I honor freedom of speech in the university, don't you know. Plus, the students love her. The students appreciate her approach—AS AN ADDITION MIND YOU TO THE MAIN WORK OF THE COURSE. And, I must say, I too appreciate her and love her work. Even teachers can learn. As that great Yankee Yogi Berra said, 'you can observe a lot just by watching'. 'The old owl sits in the oak tree, the more he speaks the more he hears, the more he hears, the less he speaks, why are we not like that old owl?'

The Rev., now Rev. Dr. Regina Walton every term shows our students three poems which grow out of the Fourth Gospel and illumine its meaning. For today's bible study I determined to have you hear them as well. They are light, joy, truth, power, meaning, and love. Gospel. They are beautiful. They are rhetorically beautiful religious language. What other than such beauty, epitomized by our lesson from 1 John, will drive out the demons of hateful religious rhetoric? And they can help us, here in Boston, here in Marsh Chapel, here today.

The poet George Herbert lived from 1593 to 1633. The English Civil War occurred soon after his death, leading to 'disestablishment'. Herbert was an 'orator' at Cambridge, and sickly. From a young age he knew that he was called to write devotional poetry. He knew John Donne, who was a friend of his mother's. He employs both trochaic and iambic meters. He writes, among other things, of the soul's call to God, and of the claim the believer has on God. That is, in his work there is a Johannine courage. Love made me welcome, but my soul drew back...You must sit down and taste my meat...Herbert wrote of love. Here is a poem (you beautifully sang it a moment ago) that draws directly on John 14:17, John 6:6, and John 16:22:

The Call

*Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth as ends all strife:
And such a life as killeth death.*

*Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light as shows a feast:
Such a Feast as mends in length:
Such a strength as makes his guest.*

*Come my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy as none can move:
Such a Love as none can part:
Such a Heart as joyes in love.*

Such a heart as *joyes in love*. As a pastor in this community, Marsh Chapel, I have the privilege of seeing women and men struggling to live in faith, and doing so by inspiration. In our community we are expecting a birth or two, fairly soon, a joy in love. In our community we have couples who are in the throes of making marriage work and work better, a joy in love. In our community we have dads and moms whose sons and daughters are in armed service, and they are praying for their safe returns, a joy in love. In our community we have some who struggle with the challenges, physical and personal, of aging, and are finding healing care, a joy in love. In our community we have students who are learning to learn what they most want to learn, not someone else's fantasy of what they might

learn, a joy in love. In our community we have women and men, the salt of the earth, who reflect and radiate Christ's joy in love.

The poet Henry Vaughn lived from 1622 to 1695. He fought on the Royalist side during the great war. Vaughn is known as one of the best followers and imitators of Herbert. In 1649, Charles I executed Oliver Cromwell. The Church of England was disestablished and the Book of Common Prayer was outlawed. The King was understood to be anointed by God. Incidentally, his brother was an alchemist. Vaughn lived during a dark time, and his poetry evokes his time. He recalls the great Pseudo-Dionysus and the Cloud of Unknowing. He celebrates night and the darkness of God, in way that I believe connects truly to our time as well. It is no accident that he bases this poem on Nicodemus at night, John 3:2ff. Here some verses from this wondrous work:

The Night

*Through that pure Virgin Shrine
That sacred veil drawn o'er thy glorious noon
That men might look and live as glow-worms shine
And face the moon:
Wise Nicodemus saw such light
As made him know his God by night.*

*Most blest believer he!
Who in that land of darkness and blind eyes
Thy long expected healing wings could see,
When thou didst rise,
And what can nevermore be done,
Did at mid-night speak with the Sun!*

*O who will tell me, where
He found thee at that dead and silent hour!
What hallowed solitary ground did bear
So rare a flower,
Within whose sacred leaves did lie
The fullness of the Deity...*

*Dear night! This world's defeat;
The stop to busy fools; care's check and curb;*

*The day of Spirits; my soul's calm retreat
Which none disturb!
Christ's progress and his prayer time;
The hours to which high Heaven doth chime...*

*Were all my loud evil days
Calm and unhaunted as is thy dark Tent,
Whose peace but by some Angel's wing or voice
Is seldom rent;
Then I in Heaven all the long year
Would keep, and never wander here.*

*But living where the sun
Doth all things wake, and where all mix and tire
Themselves and others, I consent and run
To every mire,
And by this world's guiding light,
Err more than I can do by night.*

*There is in God (some say)
A deep but dazzling darkness; as men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they
See not all clear;
O for that night! Where I in him
Might live invisible and dim.*

Nicodemus—like the the beloved disciple, like the paraclete, like the logos, like the ‘judeans’—helps form a bridge from the community of faith to the community of life, from religion to culture, from church to world. And back. *Most blest believer he! Who in that land of darkness and blind eyes, Thy long expected healing wings could see.* At Marsh Chapel we yearn for a faith amenable to culture and a culture amenable to faith. We desire such not because it is immediately present or likely with ease in our time to arise. It is not and it will not. But as Václav Havel said, ‘I hope for the good not because it will necessarily succeed, but because it is right and true.’ When the faith you personally cherish walks by night without fear across this whole great land, and when the culture you inhabit visits the community of faith without fear, by night or day—when Jesus and Nicodemus embrace—then a bit of heaven has come to earth. For example, when the beauty of the people and voices of the Marsh Choir, who embody salt and

light, find purchase in a great hall with a culturally iconic band, not particularly otherwise known for religious observance by the way, then you have an apocalyptic moment, a place of faith amenable to culture and culture amenable to faith.

You will not be surprised, many of you, by the choice for our third poet. The poet T.S. Eliot was born in America, yet lived most of his life in England until his death in 1965. He was the greatest poet of his age, and one of the greatest of any age. While our generation does not cling to him as did an earlier one, and this itself is a pity, nonetheless he touches us too. To him we owe the rediscovery of the metaphysical poets. Eliot found God's presence in God's absence. Like Herbert's mature claim upon God, like Vaughn's love of night, Eliot's presence in absence seems strikingly close to the spirit of our own age. I dedicate this reading to my dear dad who died three years ago, an authentic lover of the word. The following poem owes much to John 1:1 ff:

*If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word, unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in the darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.*

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

*Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound?*

The Word within the world and for the world.(repeat) At Marsh Chapel we honor and celebrate our strongest sister pulpits in the north, Asbury First in Rochester NY, Christ Church in NYC, Foundry Church Washington, and ours from Marsh Chapel in Boston. In Methodism our pulpits historically, since Wesley, Asbury, Cartwright, Shaw, Sockman, Tittle and all, have led the way. Now, in our time of ecclesiological fragmentation, much farther advanced than most realize, we shall need to rely not so heavily, certainly not exclusively, on the superintending voices,

important as they are, but on the deeper streams of mercy still fed by the healthy communities of faith, and by their pulpits. Wesley loved the Eastern Orthodox traditions, those of the patriarchies, not of the bishops of Rome and elsewhere, not a bad memory for a Father's Day. The communities, in the East, led and lead—Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople. We need to look East, in this sense, to listen first to the remaining vibrant pulpits. In the next decade, we shall need these four arrows together in a quiver—Marsh, Christ, Foundry, Asbury—as we minister the Word within the world and for the world. The superintending is rooted in 1 John, but the vocal leadership, the spiritual leadership, the Spirit, is rooted in John.

Here are three poems, three moments of Johannine inspiration, Herbert, and Vaughn and Eliot. One for those in need, celebrating the One who joyes in love. One for those at night, celebrating the one who marries faith and life. One for those troubled by absence, celebrating the coming, the return of voice and word. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Beloved let us love one another! (1 John 4: 7-12).