

John 17:6-19      God is a conversation

Jesus has been addressing his followers in what is called his farewell address. Abide with me, in my father's house are many rooms, he says. Now he turns to address his Creator directly. It's as if we're given a chair outside a room and invited to listen to a conversation, "I am coming to you, Abba father. I'm asking on their behalf, to include them as you have included me, so they may be one as we are one. I in you, you in me, we in them."

This may seem far removed from daily life, so let's ask about regular life when we're puttering around, listening to the radio or doing a task, or perhaps that tender time when we're waking up or going to bed. When we consider prayer, most of us would agree, prayer is a conversation with God. We also usually assume it's a conversation *we* are meant to begin. Get out the right book, straighten up, say the right words, maybe go to the right place; and wait for a response. If there's no response, we feel disappointed and rejected. We'll turn away. It's happened to me many times. If we're honest about the practice of personal prayer, silence often meets us on the other end. We might expect more encouragement.

In personal conversation with another human being, if I'm the one always starting the conversation, if I always take the initiative and hear only silence on the other end, I'm not going to stay with it very long. I'll walk away, because it's not really a conversation. Words go out from me alone.

But what if silence is exactly where we are meant to begin? What if silence is part of letting the chatter of everyday life subside? Then out of the silence a new conversation begins. The gospel reverses the initiative in prayer. *We are outside the door listening to a conversation that's already going on, already proceeding.* Rather than our starting the conversation, we're invited to listen to one in progress. And what do we hear? Rather than beliefs or doctrines or debates or "should do's" we hear longing and affection, fear in departing and yearning for reunion.

“Abba, Father, I want them to know you as I have known you; I am asking on their behalf.” It's love language. “Mine are yours, yours are mine. I am coming to you. Protect them, so they may be one as we are one”

We are invited into a conversation of mutual trust. God is not only having a conversation, *God is a conversation already going on:* Creator, Christ and Spirit. We're invited to respond to conversation already underway. We don't have to start the conversation all the time. What a relief. Silence is an invitation to listen, to seek, ask, bring our yearnings and desires to share with another.

As conversation matures and trust builds, we can move beyond polite smiles to differences we don't even know how to put into words- sighs too great for words, as St. Paul says. We can bring anger or fear, and the conversation still includes us. Peter says do not be afraid of the fiery ordeal taking place among you. Cast all your anxiety on God, because he cares for you. Creator, Christ, and Spirit absorb what we bring into their conversation.

I recently, at a social occasion, met a man I hadn't seen in two years. We were in a prayer and study group together and we used to disagree quite vociferously. He later wrote me letters opposing positions the Episcopal church was taking. I would reply in defense. When we saw each other, we immediately shook hands then gave each other a hug. What made the difference is that we were in that prayer group together and come to know God's conversation was bigger than ours. Our differing opinions were held in a greater bond, a greater conversation. More than our own opinions were at work. He said he was moving back, and re-joining the church, not because he changed his mind - he still had his opinions, but because church is where his friends were - where he could have a trusted conversation.

I slip back into thinking of God as some One out there. I need reminding that God is a conversation, a communion of self-giving love already going on around us. Our call is to open our hearts and minds to receive and respond, to hold our differences in the bigger conversation of Creator, Christ, and Sanctifier.