“Each [autumn] is the perennial move-in day on or near college campuses. Legions of parents descend with carloads that include tiny refrigerators, Ikea furniture, electronics, area rugs, and posters. They unload the one they have birthed, raised, nursed, instructed, and reproved for eighteen years or so, to prepare him or her for independence. Then, just like that, the parents are gone, perhaps wiping away tears. Perhaps their final words were ones they hoped would stick. “Study well.” “Make good choices.” “Watch your time.” “Don’t stay up too late.” But in every parental heart is a simple prayer: “O God, be with them.” In the final portion of Jesus’ great prayer for the disciples (John 17:6-19), he entreats the Father to love and protect the disciples as a parent who knows their time for direct supervision is coming to an end. In this preparation we hear his pleading like a loving parent who wants the best for the ones he has sheltered, taught, loved, reproved, and sent. Jesus begs for God to hold them in the truth that is to do as they have been taught, to follow the model established for them.” (Sunday, May 16, 2021, Seventh Sunday of Easter, 2021)

The Annual Assembly of the South Eastern Michigan Synod took place yesterday for the first time in two years as 2020 was cancelled due to the pandemic and this year’s was virtual. We all watched and participated via computer from home—and as you might imagine with a meeting and voting among a couple hundred, there were plenty of technical difficulties.

Bishop Kreiss is impressive and especially pastoral. His report to the Assembly on the activity and state of the Synod had much to do with the pandemic and its effects. He addressed the ways in which we as individuals, communities, congregations have been impacted: how it has altered life, brought difficulties, and made congregational activities impossible or required change.

In a look toward advancing connections, Bishop Kreiss also highlighted how the adoption of virtual, or technological sharing of worship has expanded each congregation’s reach. Members not physically present, former members reconnecting from new far away locations, and friends invited by word of mouth.

The difficulties of the pandemic life we have known over the past fourteen months remind me of the situation out of which the gospel of John was written. It is suspected this gospel was written within and for a group of Jesus followers who had been expelled by their Jewish synagogue for their belief in Jesus and rejected by neighbors and friends. They feel abandoned after Jesus’ ascension and likely the death of the founder of their community. (Lose, 2021)The trauma the John community experienced left them hurt, angry, and mad at the world. It’s a sentiment seemingly shared by many as our own society has been upset by the pandemic.

Spoken on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus is praying to God the Father interceding on behalf of his disciples: for safety, to be kept from the evil one, for unity that together they will keep one another safe. These are the intercessions for the 12, but also for more distant disciples—including us. They are the wishes of a guardian about to depart from his charges; be they a parent dropping off at college or the messiah soon to die and then depart, the hopes are similar.

Yet, what of the turmoil in a world disrupted by pandemic, so much so we are beginning to forget what BC (before-corona virus) life looked like? Bishop Kreiss noted that despite it all, the truth of Jesus does not change. The story of Jesus life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection remains as true today as it has for the past 2,000 years—and a divine message of grace for you, your neighbor down the street, and neighbor on the next continent is needed no less today than at any other time.

Parents leaving off their children at their new college home may exhort their child newly of age to remember their upbringing, to think on the better choice, to in some way, model the best of what they have learned. Jesus’ prayer for us is so similar. He asks that we remain in all he has taught—

“7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.” (John 17:7-8)

Live in what you have heard. Do what you have learned.

It strikes me this week especially that we need to model Jesus. Jesus prayed we would be kept safe so that we could live out everything we have learned following him.

We need to model Jesus.

We need to model Jesus with our words.

We need to model Jesus with our actions.

We need to model Jesus with our thoughts.

We need to model Jesus to our friends.

We need to model Jesus on Tuesday.

We need to model Jesus with our driving.

We need to model Jesus in our work.

We need to model Jesus to our enemies.

It is not enough for us to go to church. It is not enough for us to show up.

We need to BE THE CHURCH.

We need to model Jesus. Think about it. If we don’t model Jesus for the world, who will?

June Jordan, a poet, wrote this to commemorate the 40,000 women and children who presented themselves in bodily protest against the “dompass” in the capital of apartheid, a legal system which repressed black people, keeping them from owning land, working for fair wages, and living with dignity. The poem was presented at The United Nations on August 9, 1978.

It is entitled, *Poem for South African Women.*

***Poem for South African Women***

Our own shadows disappear as the feet of thousands
by the tens of thousands pound the fallow land
into new dust that
rising like a marvelous pollen will be
fertile
even as the first woman whispering
imagination to the trees around her made
for righteous fruit
from such deliberate defense of life
as no other still
will claim inferior to any other safety
in the world

[…]

And who will join this standing up
and the ones who stood without sweet company
will sing and sing
back into the mountains and
if necessary
even under the sea

we are the ones we have been waiting for

from Passion (1980)
and from Directed by Desire. The Collected Poems of June Jordan.
Copyright 2005 by the June M. Jordan Literary Estate Trust

***Poem for South African Women***

Few could have imagined that we’d be here

It matters not which storm and gale drew us near

We’ve come this far by faith—and prayers of Jesus kept us safe

Let us tongues and talents employ

The love of Jesus a gift our God has given

This time, this place

Model Jesus

Give the world embrace

Amen.