Where Are You Staying?
John 1:35-42

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They said to him, ... “Where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where Jesus was staying, and they stayed with him that day. [John 1:38-39]

This past week, while praying over the readings we just listened to, I thought back to my seminary classmate, Patrick Russell, who died eleven years ago, at age forty-four. Patrick was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, also known as brittle bones disease.

Patrick had body organs in odd places and had broken most of his bones over the years. He could break a bone by simply taking a step the wrong way. So, it’s remarkable that he lived to be forty-four. It’s also remarkable that he was ordained a priest and served for sixteen years, primarily as a chaplain at a Catholic high school and hospital in Boise, Idaho. He compensated for his poor health by having a large personality, and he cared greatly about the students at the high school. Patrick touched many people’s lives with his large Catholic faith.

Growing up in Idaho, he spent a lot of time in children’s hospitals. His doctors came to know his medical needs very well and what medication dosages he could tolerate. Sometimes, he needed very high doses that wouldn’t be administered to most people.

I remember one incident in particular. Patrick visits another classmate in San Diego, Chuck Fuld, when he falls and breaks his leg. In one of the best hospitals in San Diego, the doctors don’t know what to do for him. He yells in pain when a nurse takes some blood, because she accidentally breaks his arm. Doctors are afraid to give him his medicine at the necessary doses, because they’ve never given such an amount before. They didn’t tend to him while he was growing up, so they don’t know better.

Then, his doctor in Boise, Idaho, flies down on a private plane into Patrick’s living hell and flies him back to Boise on that private plane.

I tell you about Father Patrick Russell, because that incident can help us understand today’s Gospel proclamation.

At the start of Jesus’ public ministry in John’s Gospel, John (the Baptist) tells two of his followers that Jesus is the Lamb of God and that they ought to check out this Jesus. So, they approach Jesus and ask: “Where are you staying?”
Some people say that that seems to be an odd thing to ask Jesus: “Where are you staying?” Not, “Where are you going?”, but rather, “Where are you staying?” Recall that John’s Gospel is written perhaps fifty or sixty years after Jesus, enough time for the enthusiasm of the earliest Christians to begin to lessen, enough time for them to wonder what this Christianity is all about, enough time for them to wonder where this Jesus can be found. That is, where is he staying today?

Perhaps those two young men, sent by John, ask Jesus their question on behalf of Christians of every generation, including us gathered here today: Jesus, where are you staying? In other words: where do we find Jesus?

Recall too that this passage follows one of the most important passages in the New Testament.

Only three and a half weeks ago, we heard stories from two other Gospels (Matthew and Luke) about Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. We hear them every Christmas, and we know them well. However, John’s Gospel tells of Jesus’ origin in a much different way.

John writes of God’s Word – a Word that was with God from the very beginning, a Word known to be powerful, a Word known to bring all creation into being, a Word that was with God and also is God. Then, there’s that important passage I just spoke of:

\[\text{The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.}\]

And, that powerful, creating, life-giving Word that took on human flesh and lived among us has the name, Jesus. And people could see and touch God’s eternal Word.

As so, when two followers of John (the Baptist) approach Jesus, they are approaching God’s powerful, creating, life-giving Word. They want to know where Jesus the Word is staying. They want to know where he’s to be found. And Jesus the Word replies: “Come, and you will see.”

And those two young men choose to stay with Jesus. They (and Christians of every generation) have seen that Jesus, God’s eternal Word, chooses to stay among the people where he continues to be a powerful, creating, life-giving Word.

Teenagers, I want to be straight with you. We make a very big mistake when we think that God is not to be found in our lives. We’re not deists who believe in God and assume God set creation in motion only to leave the scene. We say no! to that sense of God. We affirm that God’s eternal Word took on our human flesh and continues to be very present, continues to dwell among us.

It’s like my classmate, Father Patrick Russell, who was not abandoned by his doctor. Rather, his doctor flew into his life, tended to his needs, and flew him home. Just so, Jesus – God’s eternal Word – stays with us, never abandons us, continues to dwell among us.
Yes, it’s sad that Patrick lived with such an imperfect body, and it’s sad that he died forty-four years young. And yet, he knew of God’s love in the most personal of ways, because he knew he never really was alone. It allowed him a truly confident faith, a faith that others came to know through his devoted service to the people of God.

Jesus is the eternal Word of the One-who-is-love. Sunday to Sunday, we proclaim that Word from this ambo, and we receive that Word into our hands and into our lives.

Where does Jesus stay today?

Jesus stays with you and me.

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1 John 1:14.