

BEaster2

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 15, 2012

On Easter Sunday, last week, we considered the message of the empty grave.
Instead of “Here he is!”
the message is “He is not here!”

Another way to put it is:
The emptiness of the tomb can symbolize
what our lives and our world can be *emptied* of
when we live in the light of the message of Easter.

Jesus’s resurrected life says to us that all that caused his death -
human pride, power, control, human violence and vengeance,
- are not the final word.

There is a hope-filled future that beckons us forward.

The one word, other than love, but that is contained within love,
that describes what Jesus accomplished – and that outdoes death
- is forgiveness.

The love of God binds everything together.
Forgiveness releases us from what is not born of the love of God.

We die with Christ in his death in baptism
and are raised with him into the new life in grace.
In the resurrected life, we have access to the final yet never-ending word.
We can dwell in the life-giving love of God
and we are set free by the ongoing, unfailing forgiveness of God,
from anything that holds us back from the glorious power of God’s love among us.

“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (Romans)

In the instructed Eucharist during Lent
it was posited that the liturgy is our recipe for how to live.
When we show up at church on Sunday,
we are diverse and divergent individuals who have chosen to converge;
to be together with each other and with God.
Together, we bless God, we praise God.
We are instructed and formed by the Holy Spirit
through our sacred texts and our prayers.

Then, in the form of our confession,
we set down, let go, of anything that separates us from God and each other.
And, we are assured that we are forgiven by God.
Then we exchange The Peace.
Being of one mind, one heart, one volition/purpose...
to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind strength,...
and to love one another...
by Christ, in Christ, through Christ,...
we are each set at peace and we share that peace with one another.

We are not unlike that early Christian body we read about in Acts.
The whole group was of one heart and soul.
Everything was held in common.
Acts says that the first Christian community devoted themselves
to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread, and the prayers.
That they had glad and generous hearts;
they praised God and had the goodwill of all of the people.

Now, this passage has led to many extremes
in the form of cult communities and such.
And, in those earliest days of Christianity,
they expected Jesus to return within their lifetimes.
So, why keep the house and all the belongings if he's coming back
and you're going to be raised into a kingdom that has no end?
All of a sudden, why mow the grass. Why go to work?
And that was a huge issue in the earliest Christian communities.
How to live in the tension between responsible living
and being ready for life in God's realm.
Perhaps it is what keeps the earthly realm and the heavenly realm
stretching toward one another.

Well, the early Christians acted in accordance with the knowledge they had.

And it is up to us to discern what such a message means for us.
It's important for us to live in Christ just as they did,
but in our own day and time.

Two things we can take from Acts:
They weren't about maintaining or preserving an institution.
They were about doing what it took to fulfill the purpose
they believed God had given them.

The call of a community of faith is twofold.

It's as simple as this.

First, you look at what you have.

You appreciate your resources and imagine what they can be in a community founded on love and forgiveness and when placed in God's creative hands.

Your building. Your property.

Your unique experience, your story, here, at Holy Spirit, of being Church.

Prison ministry. Latino/Latina ministries.

Your individual, personal wealth of gifts and talents and financial resources.

Your combined wealth of gifts and talents and financial resources.

Just imagine the possibilities! Imagination is fun and it is free!

So, enjoy the process of envisioning your future.

And secondly,

Open your eyes wide and see what the needs are, right here in this county.

In Acts, there was not a needy person among them.

Where are the needs, what are the needs, that you can be equipped to meet?

There are many needs in this world:

From the news this week:

Look at the needs the American Muslim doctor met when he went to Gaza and treated all those children who have been injured by the horrific violence there.

What are the needs here?

Surely much of what you are already doing:

the need to address poverty, inadequate housing, illiteracy.

And look further:

What about loneliness, which is its own kind of poverty ?

-among college students,

-elders living alone and whose autonomy is decreasing,

-those leaving prison and re-entering society.

The needs of the environment, the mountains, the rivers and streams, the air, the animals – their need for human advocates.

And, forgiveness, reconciliation.

What work of reconciliation, within our lives and beyond, needs to be done?

Rowen Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury wrote:

There is no hope of understanding Resurrection
outside of the process of renewing community in forgiveness.

This is all just off the top of my head.
I haven't done any research at all about Madison County!

And what about your needs as a community?
What does a church look like in which the world, or the county, says,
"Look at how they love one another?"

The gates are about to open, brothers and sisters!
Your senior warden will give a report at the end of this service.
It's time for the gates to open. It's time for the waiting to end.
You don't want to search for a new rector who will come in and tell you who you are.
You want to gather around a vision of who you are
as a community infused already with resurrected new life,
and God will surely provide a priest to partner with you.

I've always liked doubting Thomas.
I've liked his insistence that he be witness to the Risen One.
Maybe Jesus isn't criticizing Thomas,
insinuating that by not needing to see Jesus first-hand,
We have the greater faith.
But Jesus is saying,
"How blessed are those who have a first-hand experience
when they encounter a body of Christ, a community of faith,
fully living with the resurrected life."