

Julie's Sermon

May 1, 2011

Well, here we are....

The celebration, the pomp, the parade

The big build up, the "Great Event",

The glorious celebration of historic proportions.. now behind us.

Kate and William are married. Can you imagine what relief they must feel. All the preparation, all the hype, all the scrutiny- behind them. Now they are off on their honeymoon. Hopefully out of the limelight for a while then on to their new life together.

As a church, we have just been whisked through a busy season of our own. Ash Wednesday, the 40 days of Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Black Saturday and finally Easter.

Now, the Sunday after Easter. Do you know that this Sunday in some church calendars is referred to as "low Sunday"? (Kenneth Carter, Christian Century reflections on the lectionary, April 19, 2011). No, not low because of attendance, although this is known as one of the least attended Sundays of the year. But "low" because in the flow of life among God's people, this is the calm after the storm.

I like to think of the 40 days after Easter as the "re-orientation" season. All of the followers of Jesus must have had some sort of hope or dream about what the Messiah was going to do for them and their people. If they believed Jesus was the Messiah, then their dreams must have been crushed on good Friday. Now they probably don't know WHAT to think.

Our new testament scripture for today will give us an insight into what was happening in those days after the resurrection with the followers of Jesus.

Reading from Luke 24:13-36

Let's pray-

O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them. Take our hearts and set them on fire for you." Amen

Our passage opens with two travelers, disciples, on their way to Emmaus, a seven mile walk from Jerusalem. We don't know why they are headed there. All we know is that as they walk they are mulling over all of the things that have happened within the last week. They are trying to get a grasp on what has just taken place. A stranger comes along side of them and asks them what they are talking about.

They are stunned " Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem that hasn't heard what has taken place?" They are amazed that someone coming from Jerusalem was unaware of what was going on.

They are sad when they start their tale "We are talking About Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and everyone."

They are shocked because " Jesus was delivered to his death by the chief priests- He was crucified" they still can't believe it happened.

They are disillusioned because they " had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel"

And they are confused "Some women went to the tomb and they did not find his body, but they came back saying that they had seen angels who told them them Jesus alive".

You've got to admit, that is a lot to digest in a matter of three days time. This was not at all what they had expected. If Jesus had truly been the Messiah, it probably wouldn't have turned out this way.

Then Jesus, who of course, is the unrecognized stranger in this story says to them, "Oh how foolish you are and slow of heart to believe what the prophets have said" The greek word for foolish here, *Anohtoi*, also means, not comprehending, observing or considering to the fullest extent- Basically- he is saying "how narrow minded of you". These two are not grasping the whole picture.

Jesus, begins to take these bits and pieces of past history, hopes and recent history, and weaves together a "bigger picture". Starting with Moses and continuing on through the scriptures, he starts to reveal what this all means. Have you ever had a hard concept to grasp in school, it just doesn't make sense. Then a teacher or friend walks through it with you, bit by bit and you slowly begin to see- Oh, yea..... That's what it must have been like for the travelers.

When they came to their destination, they still wanted more. They asked this stranger to stay with them. When they ate dinner together this stranger broke the bread and gave thanks for it. That's when it all came together. AH HA- That's when they finally recognized the Truth- Jesus is alive and he is with them.

And then, the scriptures say, he was gone. He vanished out of their sight. But left behind two hearts on fire, for the text reads, "They said to each other 'did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures.'" Needless to say, they could not sit still so they went all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples about what happened to them.

When we are asked to read the eye chart at the Doctors office we don't say, Eftthrod- We say E F T H R O D C etc. But when asked to read out loud in school we wouldn't read T H E C A T R A N. That is not really reading as we all know. That is just saying the letters. And of course, the first thing we need to do if we are going to learn to read is to learn the individual letters. Reading is taking the alphabet and forming them into words, forming words into sentences, forming sentences into paragraphs, forming paragraphs into stories or reports. It is these variations that make meaning out of

individual letters. We all play the "spell it" game when young children are around. We say "It is time for the kids to go to "B E D" or "Is it OK if I give your kids some C A N D Y? When we use the letters it has no meaning to the child, whereas, if we use the letters together as a word, they have enough power to send a kid running to or away from us.

When Jesus tells the disciples they are foolish and narrow minded, it is because he recognizes that they are only focused on individual pieces of this story. He helps them take individual letters and form them into words, from them into sentences, form them into paragraphs- Until they begin to grasp a bigger story. I like what one commentator says "Easter dawns on them gradually."

And, I suppose, Easter dawns on us gradually, if we are really honest about it. We read the scriptures, we hear the stories again and again. We sing the hymns and worship songs. We pray. There are times when, all of these activities simply feel like individual letters, words without meaning and without power.

And then, then there are times when the pieces come together a bit and we catch a glimpse. And Jesus is there beside us. We sing a hymn, we pass the peace, we hear ancient words from scripture and something clicks, some sort of fog lifts. Our hearts burn within us and we know God is near. There are two instances I can think of in our church that I almost always sense God's presence. One is during Communion when I hear the words "The gifts of God, for the people of God". I don't know why, but those words always stir my heart.

The other is our litany of parting when the children leave us and go to Junior worship. "May God be with you there.. May God be with you here". We have parted from many a person with the same words. Friends who have left our congregation for a short time, Buckley, Linda, Conor and Shane, Sarah and Danielle. And other friends who have moved on to other cities like Erin and Andrew. There is a lump in my throat when I say

these words sometime. Maybe partially because of sentiment.. But mostly because of the power conveyed. God will be with whoever leaves and God will be with whoever stays. We are bound and connected together by this power of God. That sets my heart on fire..

Just as the travelers we read about today, we need to be careful not to become so foolish, or narrow-minded that we cannot hear the fullness of Easter Story. We can get so wrapped up or carried away with the bits and pieces of our life or our doctrine that we aren't able to see the bigger truth we are a part of. We are bugged because we sang the wrong words to the wrong tune on Easter Sunday (OK, I was bugged- we did not sing the words of Christ the Lord is risen today to the right tune! Not to mention that the Easter Hymn "He Lives" isn't even in our hymnal.) We can get embroiled in minor things and totally miss the Easter Message. We are only seeing the letters and reading the words, the paragraphs and the Great story.

Easter dawns gradually on us. It reorients us. It reminds us that there is more than letters and laws and Presbyterian rules of order to our life of faith. It reminds us that God works in mysterious ways. Easter pulls us into a much larger story that connects us as a people of God, to the past, the present and the future.

Today is the first Sunday of the month, and if Ken were here we would have the opportunity to participate in communion together. Our first Communion after Easter. I am sad we aren't able to do that because it is the perfect story to follow up with communion. Jesus is made known to these two travelers in the breaking of the bread. He is made known to them as the Risen Christ for the first time. And although we won't be receiving communion today I want to close with the wonderful Easter filled words. The body of Christ was broken for you, The blood of Christ was shed for you. These of the gifts of God for the People of God. Amen.

