

April 12, 2015

1 WEEK AFTER EASTER

by Rick Carlberg

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

You recall we had a wonderful Easter, with two services and a home-cooked meal between them. Who says Methodists do not travel on their stomachs? But, what about that first week almost 1,985 years ago?

A lot transpired in that first week. The disciples were huddled together in a room, at least most of them were. The doubting Thomas had missed the earlier appearance of Jesus 7 days earlier. Despite the testimony of the others, he does not believe that Christ was raised from the dead. He had to see it for himself, to touch the nail holes in his hands and put his hand in his side. Christ appears before the disciples, even though the door was closed, and tells the doubting Thomas to knock it off – no more disbelief, but believe. With that, Thomas makes the great proclamation, “My Lord and my God!”

As part of my makeup to always look at things a bit differently, I have to ask myself, Why were they huddled together for more than a full week? Why were they not out there, traveling to as many places as they could to spread the word of God?

They remind me of ships in a harbor, airplanes on the ground and automobiles in a garage. That is where these 3 vehicle types are safest, right? But that is not what they are designed for. Ships are supposed to ply the seas, airplanes fly vast distances and automobiles can take us across continents.

These men were chosen by Jesus to do God’s work on Earth. Why are they in a house with the door closed and the curtains drawn? Now in fairness to them, they had not absorbed all of what had happened to Jesus, let alone themselves. Based on earlier conversations with Jesus after the resurrection, they knew that he had not ascended, but at the start of our gospel lesson today, the disciples are commissioned. Jesus sent them out, including the power to forgive sins. The only hitch is that Thomas was not present when Jesus said this to the others.

Yet, they sit there for another week, waiting for further instructions. What more is there to do? Why are they not dividing up the known world on a map, packing their worldly possessions and spreading the good news, one step at a time outside that house, making Disciples of Christ?

The only conclusion I can come to is that they were tired, probably confused. Who was in charge now? What duties were assigned to each of the remaining disciples? Who was going to go where? Were they going to try to stay in touch with one another? When Christ returns, he does not chastise them for sitting around. He says, "Peace be with you", not once but twice. All of the disciples were reacting to extraordinary times.

To a certain extent our 12, "The 12", are just now recovering from the stress of our two performances. There was so much to do. We had a new backdrop, one that required two dye attempts (the first one came out pink) and the removal of the old and installation of the new fabric. Then there were other questions. Could we keep the backdrop up on Saturday night and Sunday morning at St. John's Catholic Church? That answer changed at least two times. Were all of the actors' parts memorized? There were times when I began to doubt that. Were all of the actors going to be there? We had to deal with medical concerns and missed practices. Who was running the lights? Many of us were tired and stressed from long days at work. The list goes on and on. Tom Reilly looked at me as we were setting up here for Maundy Thursday and said he had never seen me so tired. He was right. I was exhausted.

Yet it turned out. It was not perfect, but it never has been perfect. All actors were at both performances. About 250 people saw the performances, and we made money for Imagine No Malaria. People were moved. People thanked us. We educated people about the lives of these disciples and the ultimate sacrifice the bulk of them made by following Christ. We will do things different two years from now, but we did our part to show how everyday Methodists show their love for Christ by putting on what appear to be dresses and make up, upholding a 20-year tradition. Why it worked out is almost as big a mystery to me as why the disciples stayed locked up in a house almost 2,000 years ago.

So, let's look at the scripture to see if we can find a reason, some sort of common thread. Our reading from Acts goes a long way in my mind. Paul

talks about the community of believers. They have one heart, committed to holding everything in common, particularly the belief in a resurrected Christ, and they are not going to be quiet about it. They were not needy, they had everything through grace. With pooled resources and cooperation they were unstoppable.

Now, our 12, “The 12”, pooled their resources and cooperated with one another to bring the production to life. If Tim and Ken had not pooled their collective knowledge of electrical wiring, I doubt we would have had theater lights at St. John’s. We discovered their main breaker box was not what we expected. We laugh about it now, but I remember a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach when this knowledge came to light late on a Saturday afternoon when the commercial electrical supply shops were closed. We worked it out, borrowing power creatively from other circuits.

This unity of “The 12” family, men and women, is reflected in the Psalm reading today. This Psalm is attributed to David. His first verse says it all: “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” We ate together and worked together to pull the performances off.

Now, going back to my original question: Why did the disciples huddle together instead of spreading the good news? Maybe, just maybe, the original disciples stayed together because they liked each other and enjoyed each other’s company. They needed, however, to be pushed to action. The second visit of Christ to assure Thomas that he is indeed alive, does that. Not in the gospel reading today, we next see several of the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, including Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two others not named. Peter is reinstated as leader of the disciples, and their ministry begins.

Their ministry is to make believers that Jesus is the Son of God, so they will follow him. The disciples spread across the known world, apparently never to be together in one room again, huddling around patiently waiting for instructions. The instructions have already been given many times. As followers of Christ we need to take our cue from the commissioning given by Christ: to forgive others as Christ has forgiven our sins, however small or large those sins may be.

So, my 12 and supporting cast, we are like the original disciples who huddled around in a locked room. We have been through a lot, coping with

the strain of putting the production on while struggling with our normal daily activities. We got through it, and we need to celebrate that. We must not forget what we represented, however. Just because we put on a dress and makeup doesn't mean we have fulfilled our obligation to convert others to Christ. Much like the work of the real disciples almost 2,000 years ago, we need to keep working at it.

Amen

Benediction:

Let us go out into the world motivated by the good news that Christ is our new life. Forgive one another, love one another, serve one another. May the grace, love and peace of Jesus Christ be with all of you, now and forever. Go in peace, knowing we have a new life in Christ to do his will on Earth. Amen.