

2 Easter B

Acts 4:32-35

Psalms 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

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It's a pipedream.

Could you imagine if one Sunday the whole membership of Holy Spirit came to church? I've been to funerals where we've had to put people into every nook and cranny to fit everyone in, but on a Sunday? Our ushers would be hopping! We wouldn't have enough chairs or even space with all the rooms filled.

Or what if, without notice, the whole membership pooled their resources and finances and made it available for the good of all? It might mean no more interest paid to the banking business, a better approach to limited resources, we'd save time and energy. Think of how much less stress and worry we'd feel if we knew that we were not alone in making ends meet. Can you imagine the benefit for our families?

Could we even dare to dream of a day when no one, *not one person*, had any need, because this community was of one mind and spirit, fully living out the Christian faith and life. Everyone would have a place of belonging, no one left behind, no one judged for things they cannot control or things they fear someone will find out. Grace alive! Forgiveness alive! Understanding alive!

It reminds me of John Lennon's song "Imagine." Especially vs. 2 that reads:

Imagine no possessions,

I wonder if you can.

No need for greed or hunger,

a brotherhood of man.

Imagine all the people sharing all the world.

It may sound like a pipedream, but Luke records that this type of thing happened among the early Christians. It's not that they were really any different than ourselves. They too lived in a world with power run amuck, with the threat of violence ever present, with oppression, with fear for their families, struggling to meet the needs of each day. They were a small group who knew they couldn't change the powers that be or the larger context in which they lived. After Jesus died and was resurrected life pretty much went on as is, Rome was still in power, Christians were still being persecuted, life in Jerusalem was largely the same. It's not as if immediately after the resurrection everyone had an epiphany and began to get along.

Often when things are not going our way, we look outside of ourselves for change to happen. As an example, a friend of mine once picked up a book that seemed to be the answer to her troubles, I don't exactly remember the title, but it was something like: "How to change your husband." So you get the idea – she was frustrated with him and like every marriage there were some good days and some not so good. She picked up the book in high hopes of some ideas to fix things, for suggestions on how to help their marriage – all very well intended.

But... the whole book wasn't actually about changing husbands at all. It was about being in relationship and making change together and largely about understanding oneself.

After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus' followers knew the world was a different place even though things went on pretty much as they had before. Jesus' followers understood that the world outside of them, the culture all around them was impossible to change. They didn't have the power or influence or position to effect much change in the people and systems around them. But they did discover that they could change one thing: themselves.

And that made all the difference.

This small community became grounded in The Way, which is what the early believers were called, and they came to understand that nothing outside of them could change who they were inside. They came to understand that despite all the challenges around them, they were free on the inside, they were loved, accepted, forgiven, and that they could choose to embrace a new way of seeing one another, a different model for living, and a new love for the world.

What they model for followers after them is that we have a choice to conform to the demands of culture or walk the path of faith. We may not be able to choose what others say about us, but we do have the ability to believe what God says about us. We may not be able to control mammoth economic systems, but we can choose to not conform to gods of consumerism. We may not be able to hold off the coming of death, but we can let go of our fear choosing instead to embrace God's promises.

Several years ago at a confirmation retreat I had the students make shadow shapes of their head. We talked about the things people said that were hurtful and wrote those words all around their shadows. The world was saying some pretty painful things to them: stupid, ugly, fat, useless, chicken, etc. Interestingly, the words that stuck, that were heard the loudest were the hurtful ones, no one wrote good words.

Then we looked at the Bible and looked for the ways God speaks to us. These words the students wrote inside the shape of their head: forgiven, beloved, chosen, royal, created good, loved, healed, follow me. And finally, we cut out the shapes, removing all the negative words they had heard and leaving behind the good as a reminder of their true identity.

When we cling to the identity God gives us, we can do incredible things. When we trust that we are completely accepted, forgiven, loved, and know that is true for others, we learn to trust. Fear is overcome, we no longer have to measure up or fit in or behave or look a certain way to be accepted. This is what the early believers came to understand and it completely changed the way they lived even though the rest of the world looked pretty much the same. This new inner strength was critical in the years to come as they continued to face persecution and trial.

It wasn't easy. All around them, the world told the disciples that the world could never be a different place. Jesus was dead and all hope was lost. Even Thomas, one of Jesus' own Apostles, who had been at Jesus' side through it all, didn't believe that change was possible. Until, that is, Jesus allows him to see for himself. A resurrected body, complete with the marks of crucifixion, changed everything.

For us, I hope we see in their story, that change is possible. We need not feel that we are too small or too inept or that the world is too broken to be different. We may not be able to change what happens around us, but we most certainly can change what happens inside of us. When we begin to follow God, to think differently, to allow the spirit room to work among us – life can be very different indeed.

Thanks be to God! Amen.