



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
5-7-2017

I'm going to tell you my computer password. It's been my password for a long time although I change the capitals and the numerals from time to time – and I'm not going to tell you that sequence. My password is: I love the Church! I love the church – and one reason I love the church is because of this reading we have from Acts.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter. We've just experienced the amazing joy of the resurrection and new life. And now we are experiencing the start of the Christian church and this is crazy, wild stuff we read in the Bible. The first chapter of Acts finds thousands of people bewildered and amazed and perplexed by this Holy Spirit wind blowing through the crowd and so Many people are being baptized and joining in the newly forming Christian community.

Now in Acts 2 we get a description of this beginning church and oh my goodness is it beautiful. "Awe came upon everyone, all who believed were together and had all things in common, they spent much time together in the temple, had glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people and day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." This story of the beginning of the Church is glorious, it is of a church with life, a church on the move, a sharing, caring, joyful community of people. Oh, I love the church.

For the church came into being because of the recklessness of God's love, the recklessness of God's love shown through Jesus – a Jesus who showed us what love looks like – an expansive love that says yes to both death and resurrection, a love that says yes to hard stuff – hard stuff like what we experience in our lives and in our churches; hard stuff that happens because of love. For I'm pretty sure this scene we hear about in Jerusalem soon had disagreements and tough moments – in spite of the abundance of love.

You see, I think the recklessness of God's love, that overwhelming, expansive love troubles people, they push it away, they become embarrassed by it, afraid of it, even hateful to someone who keeps loving rather than choosing hate, loving rather than being practical, loving rather separating out from certain folks, loving when told not to love. I think we all know and accept it was that crazy love of Jesus that got him killed. It was his crazy love that undermined the authority and desired power of religious and secular rulers.

And the same holds true today. We can all think of people and churches that, historically and currently, get wrapped up in power struggles. Some churches and their teachings wound groups of people through condemnation, exclusions, oppression. And I don't need to point the finger

outside of our doors. We too have hurt each other at some time and in some way. In a couple of weeks our “Who Are We?” class will watch the video about sin. From it I remember a bishop talking about people joining the church with enthusiasm and hopefulness and then coming to him disillusioned and hurt by something that takes place in the church. His response is that we all fail – every single one of us. Someone will enter our church and they will be messy in a way that we cannot cope with, or maybe loving in a way that our ugly selves can’t handle. And every single one of us will come face to face with a person that we refuse to love, and with a decision that we don’t like, and we will find our own self trying to exclude someone or maybe find out that we are not being included somehow. Being in the church will give us hurts.

But I’m pretty sure Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit know that. They know we are not perfect. That’s why Jesus came to share with us death AND resurrection. Parts of us will experience death in our hopes, our dreams, our desires. And with patience and perseverance there will be resurrection for us. For the Spirit of God is at work when other people fail us and when we fail other people. Horrible, heartbreaking failures in the church can’t, don’t, and won’t stop the church and God’s spirit from moving through us and sweeping through the world. The Good news is that we are all welcome in our messiness and diversity and differences and heartbreaks and hopes. The church will never be stopped by our sins and our failures – whether those are communal or individual. We are the church, the beloved Body of Christ, a people being changed and transformed by the reckless love of a God who can’t stop loving, ever.

Perhaps those words and ideas are too grand or too churchy for you. So let me close with a story about my sister who lives in Cody and who I attended church with last Sunday. Jif is a kind and rather reserved person. She works as an attorney who is very careful at her job and with her time. She spends a lot of time on her own, somewhat shy and avoiding any sort of social life. Several years ago she began to attend the Episcopal Church and it is one of her things she does but she is quiet about it and doesn’t say much to any of the rest of us in the family. She told me last week she was going without me, as she always goes a half hour early and I could find her in the last pew in the corner of that last pew – which I did. Before the service began and during the peace and right after the service – before Jif slips out the doors without ever going to coffee hour – I’d say nearly a dozen people came by to say hello and chat a little with her. She’d tell me, “That’s Ernie. Sometimes he sits by me. Bill isn’t here today. Sometimes he sits by me. Oh, I met that person on a board we were on. Oh, that person knew me from high school. Yeah, Wally and I have done the audit for the church for a couple of years”....and on and on. Later, at the hospital I was telling mom and dad what a nice little community surrounds Jif when she is at the church and she spoke up about why she goes.

She told us she goes a half-hour early to reflect in a quiet and lovely space, filled with gentle noises as people arrive and prepare to worship. She told us she spends the week with people who are angry, greedy, hurt, fighting. She sees the ugly side of lots of people most of the time. She told us that coming to church centers her. She finds that there are still people willing to be kind to each other, there are people willing to be glad to be alive, people willing to sing, people dedicated to love and hope and joy. She told us that going to church renews her and allows her to live with some peace. She told us that she needs the church. That was a lot for my sister to say. I love the church.

Thanks be to God.