

Sermon for 5-1-2011
1 Peter: 13-25

Two disciples walk to Emmaus talking about and reflecting on Jesus' death and the report that Jesus' body was gone wondering what do they do with their lives now. With their focus on death they don't recognize Jesus even as he comes alongside them. They do recognize Jesus as resurrected when Jesus breaks bread. Now they reflect on the resurrection and the scriptures being opened to them wondering what do they do with their lives now.

Having faith in the resurrection and receiving salvation makes us a part of a community of those who have new birth. We need guidance in understanding our identity and mission as part of this community of faith. What do we do with our 'new' lives? Peter pushes us, 'Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set your hope on the grace Jesus Christ will bring you.'

The life of the community of those who have new birth goes beyond sitting at the table with Jesus. It will involve action that comes from new spiritual awareness. 'Minds prepared for action' has the connotation of pulling up long robes and tucking them into one's belt to get ready to move. If you are going to swim in a race, you don't jump in the pool with your clothes on. We get ready to live in a new way for God not held back by what we think is important to us.

This takes discipline. We act with intention, our minds clear to face each situation as children of God. I wasn't thinking. It was the last swim class. It was on water safety. We were to wear our regular clothes so we could practice taking them off and making them into flotation devices. There was no problem until I got out of the pool and realized I did not have any dry clothes.

As those who have new birth, we pay attention spiritually. There is no laziness of mind, taking for granted the grace of Jesus by living in the way we did before. We also don't let things distract us from our identity as God's children and lull us into sin by carelessness or default. We don't lose spiritual concentration because of the circumstances we find in the world.

We have our hope in Jesus as an orientation towards the future. We are encouraged by this spiritual awareness to the extent that our priorities are reordered and our actions change. We don't live and act like we did before. We are to be holy; our conduct is holy as those who have new birth, because the one who brings new life is holy.

Holiness is imitation of Jesus. We see who Jesus is and follow in his ways. Holiness has two sides separation from evil (avoiding outward sin) and dedication to righteousness (delighting God.) Our new lives are made to delight God, but sinful desires don't vanish with new birth. We resist living out false values or practices those that lead to violence, exploitation or injustice. What we do with our new lives is shaped by living out God's teachings that we are spiritually attentive to as we observe the life of Jesus.

Our spiritual awareness of the need to be holy in all our conduct leads us to live out reverent fear of God and deep love for one another. We set out on this new life saying God is shaping who we are. But we can't forget that God judges deeds. Our scripture calls us to live in

reverent fear while we are living out who God has made us. We live in determination to delight God by what we do, though that keeps us from fully integrating into the life of those around us who don't care about delighting God.

In high school I didn't skip classes. This made me different from the majority of my friends. I couldn't always do what they wanted. I didn't skip classes because I wanted to delight my Mom and I was afraid of the consequences she could enforce like not playing sports if I did skip class.

Do we have fear of displeasing God? Or do we have a fear of what others will think about us as we live into a holiness that sets us apart? Peter reminds us that we were ransomed from futile ways of life by Christ. The image is one of being kidnapped by others and falling into their patterns of living. This actually happens to those kidnapped. It's called Stockholm syndrome. In one famous case a woman (patty hearst) was kidnapped and after two months of captivity actively took part in a robbery her abductors orchestrated.¹

It is natural to try to please others at the expense of following God to secure our place in the world. However, God has given us reason to set our faith and hope on him. God has acted on our behalf. Our place has been made secure through the blood of Jesus and his resurrection. God ransoms us from futile ways that we have taken on from those around us, ways that are empty, worthless, without meaningful or lasting results.

Do our actions casually disregard Christ's death and resurrection by their self-focus? Or do we live in reverent fear, showing our delight in God's salvation and our trust in him that results in a faith and hope strong enough that we will abandon the practices of our fathers and take on the practices of The Father? Honoring God with holy lives even if it increases social tension leads us to find new community among others who have new birth.

Our new lives take us out of the place we have made in the world and tie us to a community of those who have also been newly born. Our living into holiness trusting in Jesus and the power of the resurrection leads us to 'genuine mutual love,' in the community of faith. Spiritual awareness is not enough for new life. Being purified from sin, acknowledging the resurrection enables, but does not guarantee love. New life lived in reverent fear of God is evidenced by our actions based on love in the community of faith. The course-mission of our life is acted out among one another with love.

This love is deep and constant from the heart. It is not calculated or wavering. This love is constant and enduring because we have been born anew by imperishable seed and are shaped by the living enduring word of God. This love emerges from setting our hope on Jesus Christ.

Our living, our life together is no longer based on (amassing) glory that fades. It is based on God's word. It is based on Jesus dying for our sins and being resurrected to bring the hope of non-ending new life. There is a change from individual futility to covenant life together formed by faith in the resurrection. (This change has permanence. This covenant life based on Jesus makes loving deeply possible and replaces the relationships we have been excluded from by our holy conduct and reverent fear of God.

The message of Jesus communicated in his life, death, and resurrection gives life and transforms life so that we are able to act in love. Living for Christ we belong to one another in profound and unrelenting ways. Our mission is not to have deeper love. Our deeper love is a sign that Jesus is at work transforming us together as a community of faith for his mission of announcing the good news that was announced to us.

If we recognize Jesus is with us, we have faith. There will be new life characterized by holiness as we share in the character of God revealed and demonstrated to us through Jesus, a holiness put into action by reverence for God and love for one another.

Let's begin to imagine what this looks like... Living in deepening relationships with one another that support, challenge and encourage growth in faith and holiness. Discovering ways to take risks alongside one another to let others know that faith in the resurrection transforms life. Offering care for one another that makes someone say 'why did you do that?' Developing creative ministry to youth together. Forming groups that grow in deep love for one another and pray. Affirming our commitment to one another by being a part of determining our leaders today. Sharing with our leaders in discerning where we are going as a church at congregational event on May 22. Not giving up on each other when there is disagreement or change. What will you do with your 'new life' now that you recognize Jesus is resurrected?

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_syndrome viewed 4-29-2011