

Sermon for 5-8-2011
1 Peter 2:1-12

Did you ever tell your Mom the reason that you wanted something or were doing something that was suspect was because everyone else was doing it? When I did that my Mom invariably would respond, 'well if your friends cut their fingers off would you do that too?'

Resurrection brings new birth into a way of life that is different from the futile ways of those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. We began at the end of the sermon last week to imagine the actions of the community formed by those who have new birth through faith in Jesus Christ. These actions are not what everyone else is doing. They begin in reverence for God and deep love for one another.

There are other actions in community that are harmful to others. Peter makes clear, even if others are doing this, the actions of our community of faith are to be different. As we live the new life of compelling love and expand our capacity to do ministry together announcing the good news of Jesus, we get rid of these actions and attitudes that destroy community.

Malice- actions with ill intent, meant to hurt another (ex. Lashing back when things don't go your way at church by giving less.) Guile- trickery or falsehood, meant to mislead another (ex. Telling others there is no meeting, because you don't want to be the only one not there and you don't feel like going.) Insincerity- masking inward evil motive by outward righteousness (ex. Asking someone how they are doing, without really caring, just to be seen as a 'friendly person.')

Envy- opposite of thankfulness when good comes to others (ex. Complaining that we sang happy birthday to her but not to me.) Slander- speech that puts down and intends to harm (ex. Talking about something you don't like about someone at church so they will be less [important] than you.)

When we are in community we don't always get our way. We get upset. We have been hurt. We feel sidelined, our voices not heard. Many times we respond in these ways, all of which pull down and never build up. When we act in ways like these which do not honor Jesus, those who we are sent to to make disciples don't see a new community becoming like Jesus with reverence for God and deep love of one another. We are just another group each striving to get our own way. Imagine the alternative.

Local Coach Al Campman related this story to those in FCA here in Ellwood this week. "It was the State Championship vs. Chester. We had lost four players to fouls, including our two high-flying first team all-state performers. Of the seven Farrell Steelers diving on the floor that night in the 4th quarter, four had never competed in a game of this magnitude. So this was it.

Every possession the bench cheered us on as the crowd became louder and louder. Don't leave this floor without giving every ounce of energy. And everyone truly stepped up. When one teammate botched an assignment, another would step up and get the job done. When a teammate was struggling, another would encourage him with a belief that was instilled in us from years ago at the John Hetra League Elementary games. It was incredible teamwork in action.

Even today, I realize something more important happened after we got on the bus—with the State Championship trophy. In the middle of the game, during all the hectic confusion, I had stopped and looked around. Everyone had been doing all they could for their teammates, not just for themselves. I noticed a difference between our team and that of Chester, and how the Chester teammates reacted toward each other. Members of their team that was supposed to beat us in the 4th quarter were found arguing and complaining, not cheering or helping any of their teammates. There didn't seem to be any sense of community and love among them. In reflecting on that night, I realized an important spiritual lesson. We have to live our lives in a way that builds up those around us. It's not just about us, but about a community!"

Coming in a continual way to Jesus Christ enables this alternative, building up those around us, creating a community with our identity and purpose found in Jesus Christ and empowered by faith in the resurrection. Everyone stepping up, giving all their energy to serve Jesus and make him known to others. When one makes a mistake another helps. When one struggles another encourages. Taking risks with one another to do something of a magnitude we have only imagined.

Peter gives us the image of coming to Christ as newborn infants who long for pure spiritual milk, so that by it they may grow into salvation. Two things: eagerness, instinctive desire of infant for milk; and milk as something that brings needed growth.

We as the community of those newly born by faith in Jesus Christ come continually to him for that which will help us grow into salvation, the word of God. As we take it in, God's word grows us, shapes us together even when there is hurt, upset, when things don't go our way.

This alternative, a community built on love and faith is reflected by the next image Peter gives us. The image of a living building. We come to him a living stone. Jesus Christ is not some dead stone idol we can control. He is one that makes us living stones. He transforms our way of living so we can be built into a spiritual house together.

This community of living stones is built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood based on Jesus as the cornerstone. We as a holy priesthood all have access to God; we serve God personally, we minister to others, we have something to give that can help others recognize God. Christ enables us to be built into a community animated by the Spirit as opposed to a misguided group of people that simply inhabits a building or a pile of rubble (broken apart by harmful actions.)

Our new birth through belief in Jesus Christ and in the resurrection leads us to instinctively yearn for connection with Christ and the connections with each other found in Christ. We demonstrate this as a community as we gather to hear the word of God and to share Communion. Communion is our acknowledgment of oneness in Christ and oneness with one another. We may have different preferences but we come together to Christ, if indeed we have tasted that the Lord is good. We come back for more.

Those who continually come to Christ don't just grow as individuals they are built into a community. Peter describes the community of faith in this way. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of

him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (In Matthew 28, the resurrected Jesus appeared and told his disciples to build community. Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.)

The purpose of being God’s people having received his mercy is not to live for ourselves in ways that tear down others but to live in new ways that reveal the life of Christ to the world. Not individual actions but actions of a community of faith. Living in ways that set us apart for God’s cause.

I’ll end with a parable...The widow looked out her window she saw the spring grass growing taller and the tree blossoms cluttering her walk. She sighed. After this winter she knew she didn’t have the strength to push the mower. She was afraid if she tried to sweep her walk she would fall and she didn’t have the money to pay for someone to help her. Then she heard two of her neighbors across the street arguing. They were the ones who had come over together and invited her to church on Easter. One was holding a broom and telling the other who was standing behind the stopped mower to stop blowing the cut grass on his driveway. The other argued back don’t be such a perfectionist, it won’t hurt anything. The widow tuned them out. She turned around her back aching and slowly sat down in her chair.

Let us abstain from our desire to focus only on ourselves, but conduct ourselves in honorable ways that glorify God and communicate his wonderful deeds to the world. Let’s be built into the community God has imagined and made real in Jesus Christ. Let us as a community take actions that announce God’s mighty acts and proclaim his glory in ways that can be seen by others.