

SERMON for Easter 2 - Year B - April 11th, 2021.

Readings: Acts 4: 32-37; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1 - 2:2; John 20: 19-31.

As I was pondering the readings for today, I was struck with the underlying theme of 'Unity'.

Behold, how good and how lovely it is when families live together in unity. [Psalm 133:1]

We see the unity of purpose and of lives in the early church as described in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ... There were no needy persons among them. [Acts 4:32, 34]

A picture of community which builds on the earlier passage from chapter 2:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with 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. [Acts 2: 42-47]

A community that cared deeply for each other, who lived in harmony, a community, so counter-cultural, so different to any other that was around at the time, that they stood out.

"See these Christians how they love each other" – "Love one another, as I have loved you."

They became as family, united in love and focused in caring and spreading the love of God, the good news that had been Jesus' message and teaching, to all who would listen.

The Epistle from John's first letter gives us some insight into what that early community of believers was about, the honesty with which they lived their lives.

It reminded me a little of the message I felt reinforced from re-reading *The Shack* during Lent - God's unconditional love and forgiveness of us and yearning to be in relationship with us - if only we would turn around and seek it too.

John writes:

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [1John 1: 5-9]

We are encouraged to be honest with ourselves before God, for the good of the community.

Then we turn to the Gospel reading. One I have preached on so many times from the perspective of Thomas!

Here again, we have a picture of community, albeit not a terribly positive, functioning community!

Here we have the disciples huddled together in fear and confusion on the evening of the resurrection. Some of the disciples had gone early in the morning to the tomb to find it empty, then reports had started coming in that some had seen Jesus alive.

Huddled there in their fear, Jesus came to them. In their dysfunctional community, he came, bringing peace, and hope and a renewed sense of unity and purpose and breathes on them in John's version of the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Unity in community ... I wonder what that would look like today? How would our world look if we worked together consistently?

Jesus said he came to bring life and bring it in abundance.

A week later, when Thomas was with them, Jesus returned, freeing Thomas from his doubts and scepticism, so he too could share in the joy of the community and proclaim; "I have seen the risen Lord". Jesus brings freedom and life to Thomas, as well as the wider community, and so on down time to us.

What do our 'communities in unity' look like? Are they full of the life and abundance that Jesus brought?

Are we able to embrace the Thomases of our community who think differently, who struggle to accept what we might consider the norm? How do we treat them? Are they welcomed or excluded?

We heard in last week's reading from Acts, Peter's revelation about the impartiality of God – that to God all creation is loved and acceptable.

Do we offer light and life to those we struggle to connect with, or do we turn our backs and act if they are not there, that they are not asking the questions we may have no answers for?

How lovely, how wonderful it is when families, when communities live and move and have their being in unity.

What must we do to make this a reality?

One of the things I love about the Anglican Church is, at its best, the inclusivity of thought and belief – from Evangelical to Anglo-Catholic, from Charismatic to Liberal theology. At its best it can live in unity, we can allow each to find our own way to embrace the Risen, Resurrected Christ and all he means – at its worst it pulls us apart and threatens to destroy.

How can we embrace the questions and each other and rejoice in a unified community?

Perhaps this is the challenge our Risen Lord puts before us this year – to love and be inclusive, so all may believe!

Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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