

Day by Day

Psalm 23 - The Message

Acts 2:42-47

Let us pray: Shepherd of us all ... we are the sheep of your pasture, and we need your tender care. We need to hear your voice call to us, call us back from our wanderings into your fold. So speak to us now. And open our ears that may hear ... and obey. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

What an exciting time in the life of our church! The painters have been at work, the carpet layers are coming soon, the glass is almost completely installed. I've stood in what will be my new office space and the lights are on. Nobody's home yet, but the lights are on. The contractor is doing an absolutely top-notch job, and in this economic climate of *recession*, it's really heart warming to see so many workmen putting in long hours on this place we are privileged to call church. It's amazing to be here on a workday. It's like watching an ant colony, because people are everywhere, in every nook and cranny, each one diligently at work at their appointed task, paths crisscrossing through the building, every room swarming with activity. I know at the right time in the near future, all your hats will come off to the Campaign Committee and particularly to Ron Verduin, who for months now has been here 24-7 and who I believe actually sleeps on a cot in new narthex.

I can't wait for next week, for those of you who have not yet been in our new space, to stand together and gaze in wonder with a new appreciation for the amazing location of this building, perched as it is with such a spectacular view of the lake. Now, in the interests of full disclosure, some of you may know that I harbor mixed feelings about the Big Reveal coming in a few weeks time—when this wall comes down—because this preacher knows too well that when the preacher's meditation has to compete with the Word of God spoken through his splendid creation—well, I might just as well sit down and shut up and enjoy the view with the rest of you. Let's face it; God has a much better way with words than any preacher does.

But seriously, there is a new excitement in the air, and I hope you can all feel it. With Thee Gala coming up next week, there's a hustle and a bustle as the event coordination team is planning and prepping and making everything ready. I've been part of this church for over a decade, and I do believe this will be the most important and exciting evening in my time here. I truly hope you will all come. On a personal level, I am inviting each one of you. I will look for you and I will feel an empty space if you are not there.

So with all this excitement and anticipation, I read with great interest the text for this Sunday. In the quirky way the lectionary works, our scripture reading is situated right after the pinnacle day of Pentecost. Now Pentecost, if you need reminding, is that really really big show, when the Holy Spirit whooshes down like a mighty wind and blows the disciples right out of their pews, and sets the world on fire with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, as we learned about last week, Peter—the illiterate fisherman from Galilee, the one who denied he ever knew Jesus a few weeks earlier—this Peter stands up and preaches a sermon so powerful that 3,000 people accept Christ as their Savior and are baptized.

It's the birthday of the church, everyone is full of awe and wonder, it's a really, really big show. It's even bigger than Thee Gala.

And then, after that stunning experience, when lives are changed and the world turned upside down, then what happens? Luke tells us, in Acts 2:42-47 -

*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 good will of all the people. And **day by day** the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Pentecost is over. En Thusiasm - a word that means En Theos—Theos: God—En-Theos: to be filled with God. But the enthusiasm of Pentecost—the rush of the big moment, is come and gone, and we settle down to life in the day by day. Day by Day. Day by Day. O dear Lord, three things I pray: To see thee more clearly, Love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day, by day, by day, by day.

It's pretty relevant for us today to picture what will happen when the big party is over, the ribbon's been cut, and the candles burnt out, and they're sweeping up the confetti. What happens after that?

We get down to business, that's what. The straightforward business of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. This text is a pastor's dream, cos it's all laid out right here for you: The followers of the Way do not bask in the bright light of Pentecost, but move immediately to devote themselves to the day by day discipline of study and fellowship, communion and prayer.

They pool their resources so that no one wants for anything, and day by day they worship together. Day by day they eat together with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. And day by day the Lord is adding to their number those who are being saved. After the high of Pentecost, in the day by day by day by day by day, they form a community that looks for all the world like a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I want to belong to that church, don't you?

They must have been an amazing group of very holy people of deep faith. Weren't they? Or could it be that these are the same people we saw cowering behind locked doors a few weeks ago—terrified that they too might follow Jesus to Golgotha? Could it be that these are the same people whose lives were changing so fast they couldn't comprehend it all? Could it be that they faced changes more rapid and radical than a new narthex and a different view? Could it be that they were perplexed and imperfect and inadequate and fallible and that in those choppy, uncharted waters, what held them steady to their course was worship, and study, and prayer, and communion, and a radical fellowship that excluded no one and allowed no one to go away unsatisfied?

Could it be... could it possibly be... that we can belong to that church?

I'm here to assure you that yes, we can and as followers of Jesus Christ, we do belong to that church. Oh, I know—we do not yet quite match up to this perfect picture of pious people that we read about in Acts, but we are a body of believers—who worship and study and pray, and break bread together, who have much to learn about radical fellowship, but who keep trying to follow Jesus on the Way. Day by Day.

In the day by day world of church, the reality is not quite so euphoric as that outlined by the author of Acts. In the day by day we face the ho hum and hum drum and the what a bummer. In the day by day we struggle with plans and personnel and pain and promise. In the day by day the reality is that our decisions are sometimes imperfect and that we are sometimes imperfect, but this is where we hold up a picture that is perfect: the picture of life lived in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit that invites us all into a whole different way of being in the midst of turmoil and change that can be quite unsettling to us all. And this different way of being realizes that what we are about is greater than the sum of our individual parts. What we are about is being united together into the Body of Christ for the world to gain of glimpse of what the Kingdom of Heaven might look like.

Certainly here today we face great change. The building to me is just a metaphor—a symbol—a visible sign of an invisible grace... a grace that comes from our God who is always about change and growth and transformation. It's marvelous that in our community where we tear the old down to build new, this church retains its former shape and structure even as it grows new branches in new directions. We can still see clearly the original sanctuary—the little chapel in the wood. They didn't tear it down when the new branch of office space and classrooms grew in 1956. And they didn't tear it down when this sanctuary grew in 1975. And they didn't tear it down now, as we grow on this new branch in 2008. I imagine that with each phase there were growing pains as the old building needed to stretch and the congregation to needed re-imagine itself... to see itself in its new skin, to recognize the opportunities and the invitation that comes with change.

I imagine the handful of folks who started this church could in no way envision that it would grow to several dozen and then to a few hundred and then to a thousand, all gathered to worship and pray and study and break bread together.

This building about to be unveiled to us in the week to come is just a metaphor: a symbol, a visible sign of an invisible grace of the God who walks with us through the growing pains, calling us ever forward into a future we cannot yet see. I find myself, sometimes against my own resistance and to my own surprise, filled with a gathering eagerness and anticipation to see what will unfold, what God is doing in our midst, what transformation is even now underway.

After all the hoop-la and hollerin' has settled down, we too shall settle down, into the day by day of being church. Of study and worship and prayer. Of breaking bread together, and of fellowship: forming a vision of God's Kingdom in which fellowship is not just about potlucks and coffee hours, but an invitation to radical community in which we share in one another and take part with one another in being the Body of Christ. Radical community that calls us to surrender our small, individualistic and self-centered values to the abundant, extravagant amazing new life in Christ. Radical community which includes everyone, excludes no one, and ensures that all are satisfied. We can belong to a church like that.

This coming weekend will be an important and exciting event in the life of our church. I hope with all my heart you will all join me there. I've come to see that it's not about the building. It's about who we are together and together who we are called to become. Day by day. To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly. Day by day by day by day by day.