

Acts 2:42-47 Pastor Bill Uetricht 5/15/11 4 Easter

There once was a young boy who had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father, who was a minister, if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to his study and said to him, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible a bit, and get your hair cut, and we'll talk about it." After a month the boy came back and asked his father if they could discuss use of the car. The father said to him, "Son, I have been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut!" The young man waited a moment and replied, "You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that. You know, Samson had long hair. Moses had long hair. Noah had long hair, and it appears that even Jesus had long hair." To which his father replied, "Yes, and they walked every where they went!"

Truthfully, that story has nothing to do with what I am about to say. But it's holy hilarity weekend, and I thought it was funny. On a much more serious note, and definitely related to what will follow, I suppose you have heard that it has been discovered what kind of car the original apostles drove. We know it was a Honda. Why? Because the Bible says that they were all in one Accord!

Sometimes you have to wonder if the Bible is always honest. It does say that the early apostles were all in one accord. Don't you wonder if there weren't some of them who just didn't get along, if they didn't fight with each other over politics, the hymns they did or didn't like, the right method for getting rid of moles in their yards? I suspect that there had to be some real crabapples in the bunch.

Luke, the author of Acts, is known for giving us sweeping, idealized summary statements about life in the early church. Today we

get one of his finest: “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.”

Wow! As Kathleen Cobler said at our Thursday Bible study, “It would be nice if life were really like that.”

Yes, what we have in Acts today is an idealized picture of the early church. I’ll bet things weren’t always that rosy. I’ll bet some people didn’t share; some people didn’t have glad and generous hearts; some people didn’t show up for their common meals. But I suspect that whether the early church was idyllic or not is really not the point. The point has to do with the power of the Spirit. The Spirit showed up on Pentecost day, and when the Spirit shows up things change. Not only are there wonders and signs being performed, community—deep, practical community—is formed. When the Spirit shows up, generosity arrives; people sit down and eat with each other. When the Spirit arrives, life is not simply about my personal well being. It is about **our** well being. When the Spirit arrives, a community that is marked by a few having a lot while others have a little is not sufficient.

When the Spirit arrives, there is a sharing of God’s abundance. When the Spirit of Jesus arrives, there is, as an old movie title suggests, “an incredible lightness of being.” When the Spirit of Jesus arrives, life is not about holding on and grasping, as if holding on and grasping will make sure that life and people don’t pass through our fingers, will make sure that life is under our control. When the Spirit of Jesus shows up,

life isn't about control; it is about grace. And when grace reigns, there is an amazing lightness to life.

The Spirit of "Holy Hilarity" is the right spirit for a church that grasps the power of grace, the power of the Spirit of the risen Jesus. The incredible heaviness of spirit that some of us live with is often a spirit that comes as the result of the belief that life is about us, our ability to control it. The crabbiness that some of us demonstrate comes from our mistaken notion that life is ours to earn, to prove. Jesus is raised from the dead. That is to say, that which has the biggest control over us, that which dominates much of our lives—death--does not speak the final word. Life wins. So why be so serious? Why live life holding on to everything, not letting anything go? Why be cranky about new experiences, new songs, new people? Why hang on to money as if letting it go will make life unmanageable? Why keep yourself from investing fully into community? Why prevent yourself from laughing heartily, crying deeply, dancing foolishly, giving wildly, loving recklessly?

Jesus, in our gospel lesson for today, pictures himself as the shepherd of the sheep. He describes other leaders as thieves and bandits. These other leaders aren't after the best interests of their sheep. They only want to get at them so that they can use them. Jesus is not that kind of leader. He comes into the sheep pen by the front gate. He is honest in his dealing with them. He is committed to them. He knows and calls them by name. He is not a stranger to them. He has an intimate relationship with them.

People, this is the reality that we live within. We live in light of the Good Shepherd, in light of one who loves us, who knows by name. We live in light of one who wants to take us out into good pasture, one who has come to give us life that is always abundant, always full. Our

lives, therefore, do not need to be so heavy, so dominated by seriousness, so controlled by our need to control. God is our shepherd. He places us in green pastures and leads us beside still waters. God restores our souls and accompanies us through the valley of the shadow of death. God throws a huge and lavish party for us, even in the presence of folks who don't like us. God is a God of great abundance. So lighten up. Relax. Devote yourselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship. Eat lots of fun meals with one another, and pray and play with each other. Let go of your money and your possessions. And do all of this with glad and generous hearts, praising God and sharing joy with lots of friends.

I suppose that you haven't heard the one about the two shepherds? Well, two shepherds were leaning on their crooks at the end of a long hard day of shepherding. The first shepherd asked the second, "So, how's it going?" The second one sighed and shook his head, "Not good. I can't pay my bills, my health isn't good, my kids don't respect me, and my wife is leaving me." The first one replied, "Well, don't lose any sheep over it."