

"To Be Continued...."
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Acts 5:27-32 **April 15, 2007**
San Dimas Community Church, UCC

Two weeks ago at the Wednesday morning Bible class, we read the resurrection texts from all four of the gospels. The question was asked by one member of the class, "how do we account for the difference in so many of the details?" Mark, the earliest written gospel is very short in recording the resurrection. Matthew, Luke, and John add to the story but the number of angels at the tomb vary, the number of women going to the tomb is different, how and when Jesus first appears to the disciples are not the same, and the locations, be it, Galilee or Jerusalem vary. The class concluded that part of the inspired message of the Easter story was that specific details were not as important as the people's experiences of the risen Christ. On Easter morning something happened that changed their lives forever; and if it hadn't happened, we would not be here today.

This week I thought a lot about what Jesus' disciples would have been feeling during the time inbetween Good Friday and Easter. Afterall, they'd been with Jesus a lot over three years as he journeyed the area. Their thoughts hung on his every word. They were with him for all the highs and lows, the running out of food and having too much of it. Together they had shared with Jesus intimate pastoral moments of healing and touching peoples lives. And then it was over, rather abruptly. Jesus is arrested, the disciples scatter, they're afraid of guilt by association; they feel despair as all their hopes and dreams that were wrapped up in Jesus disappear, and they probably felt very, very lonely. They had left everything to be Jesus people; they had indeed put all their eggs in one basket.

Everywhere they looked they must have seen reminders of what had been and was no more, mountains from where Jesus spoke, places where he healed, roads they'd walked together, all poignant reminders of the person they loved and in whom they placed so much hope. So just when they think it's all for nought they experience the vision, the presence of Christ, and they realize the story is "to be continued...."

If we can get beyond a superficial reading of the Bible, we see that the Bible describes in detail and accuracy our struggles as human beings. Just so I give the Wednesday night Bible class equal time, last week we began reading the book of Jonah. Oh, how he, like we, want to run away and hide from God's call on our life. The Bible is so good at placing a mirror before us and in that mirror we see ourselves. The Easter story is one more time when the divine and we humans come face to face.

Usually by the time we're all grown up, we know what it's like to lose a friend, to lose a job we thought held a future for us, to question the meaning of life. We know (like the disciples) fear, disillusionment, and loneliness. It's part of living. So when we experience the first glimpse of new life, new relationships, new purpose, we are crazy with joy. That same joy propelled the disciples to continue what had begun with Jesus. His words were alive, his message still preached, his life was to be continued.

The disciples are so inspired that they are not so careful in how they share this good news. They keep getting in trouble, beaten, imprisoned. But nothing could stop them now. They're brought to the council of the temple because once again, they have not kept their mouths shut; they're still stirring up trouble and the Jewish leaders fear being tromped down

by the Romans who want calm in the neighborhood. The high priest and council try to enforce kind of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, but those crazy Jesus folks won’t go along with it.

A few verses beyond where the lectionary ends, we read of Gamaliel, a Pharisee, not exactly a friend of Jesus, but Gamaliel has the wisdom to calm the temple council down. He kind of convenes a “side-bar” and convinces them to “let it be.” He says if Peter and company have a human agenda, it will fail. But if they are following God’s call, nothing you can do will thwart their efforts. This is good advice for us when we get so anxious about the day in day out workings of the church. If what we’re doing is of God, then nothing can thwart it. Gamaliel is patient and willing to trust the playing out of events in a future that belongs to God not humans. If like Gamaliel, we can “let it be” and focus on the long term, we are placing our trust in One greater than us.

It is difficult to imagine the success of the early Christian movement without noticing the devotion of Peter and the others. They were risk-takers. Peter rather “in your face” makes the point: “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” The experience of Jesus’ presence gave them courage to stand and deliver.

Today when we’re on road trips we sometimes notice little crosses that have become shrines with pictures or flowers of someone’s loved one who has died at that spot along the road. Along the road of life are many of these little crosses because life has many little deaths, markers of endings and beginnings. Our last hymn we sing today talks about endings and beginnings. Easter can not be limited to spring flowers and butterflies evolving from cocoons but in a cold, lifeless winter whether it is outside our window or within our hearts, these signs of hope and life in the future comfort and inspire us.

And so the Easter story is “to be continued....” But it’s not the same as when we watch our favorite TV show and are left with a cliff-hanger and the words “to be continued....” When that happens, we anticipate a climactic event in next week’s show. But “to be continued...” in real life is more like putting one foot in front of another, to persevere, having the wisdom to let it be, and to live believing that there is more to come, “unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.” AMEN