

“Easter Continues”
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Acts 5:27-32 **May 2, 2010**
San Dimas Community Church, UCC

There’s nothing quite like baptizing babies and receiving new members to remind us that the message of Easter continues. It continues in all the new beginnings of our lives. It unfolds in the life of a child who is received and loved and nurtured within the faith community. It happens in our world when we see, really see, the beauty of spring rising from winter. Easter is the possibility of God’s in-breaking in our world in ways we could not even imagine!

As we gather to worship on this fifth Sunday of the Easter season, our lesson takes us back in time to reflect on how Easter changed the lives of the first disciples. We get glimpses of how their experiences of the risen Christ changed their lives and how it might change our lives today. On Easter morning the marvelous happened; and if it hadn’t happened, we would not be gathered here to remember today.

The first disciples were unique in the intersection of their lives with the passion of the Christ. After-all, they’d been with Jesus 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, plains 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 presence of Christ, and they realize the story of Easter continues. Jesus is not lost to them but lives anew and empowers them to be new people, resurrected people, people moved from despair to letting Christ’s message shine through them. So when they experience this life empowered by the resurrection, they are crazy with joy. That joy propelled the disciples to continue what had begun with Jesus. His words were still alive, his message still preached, his life still continuing.

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.

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.” Words our Sister Marion reminds us of often. The experience of Jesus’ presence gave them courage to stand and deliver. In the face of danger and death, the early followers of Jesus let their lights shine. Their faithfulness encourages us to do the same today. As today’s anthem says: “We stand on a promise that stands the test of time.” Faithful people throughout the ages have found their place in God’s drama of salvation history. Often it is a witness to the Christ within the context of their world and their world’s problems and challenges. This is why the anthem notes: “When the Spirit moves our will, just LET IT SHINE! Maybe God is speaking still! Just LET IT SHINE!”

And like those earliest disciples who knew their words took them to dangerous territory, we hear the anthem’s words: “Witnessing far beyond where it’s safe says that we are a people of faith.” This is the cost and joy of discipleship! Now, what we choose to witness about is sometimes the tricky part. What is obviously the Easter message of peace and justice to one person may not be so clear to the mind of another. We can be brave in our convictions without making others feel inferior in their own.

What helps me is to keep my eyes on Jesus, to remember what was the core of his resurrection message. And it’s not complicated; it’s not hard to understand. Jesus was about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those in prisons of society or prisons of the heart, and being the compassion of God in the world. Jesus included not excluded. People got annoyed with Jesus because he invited the street people to come in to dinner. He was on the side of those who no one else would stand with and stand up for. If we’re not sure what we’re to witness to, looking to how Jesus showed the compassion of God is always a good choice! And so Easter continues today as we bear witness to a compassionate God in our many and varied ways. What gives us strength is that we gather in humility to affirm we are united even in our differences by sharing the bread of life and the cup of blessing that united Jesus, his followers, and the Holy in their midst. We will not get full physically by a morsel of bread dipped in a cup of grape juice, but our spirits will be filled with renewed sense that we stand on a promise that stands the test of time, and that together we are called to witness to a new reality of God’s compassion which does not draw lines between those that belong and those that don’t, those who are worthy and those who are inferior. For God’s circle is wide enough to embrace all people, and when we draw God’s circle wide, then we, too, “Let It Shine.”