

7 Easter, Year A: 5 June 2011

The apostles want and need safety. They ask Jesus whether this wouldn't be a good time to restore David's Kingdom, a return a moment in the history of Israel when the nation seemed in retrospect to be secure. Jesus' reply must have only increased their insecurity.

The women and men who met with Jesus before his Ascension had, to this point, never left the tiny land area that made up their own country. Now Jesus orders them to go to the ends of the earth and spread the Good News that the reign of God has been inaugurated once for all through the God-filled life and teaching of Jesus. Rather than assuring his disciples that they may finally rest in a safe haven, Jesus challenges them to take enormous risks for him.

How close to home this is for us as well. Last Sunday the group brainstorming ideas for next year's adult forums suggested that we put Evangelism 101 on the list; "We don't know how to talk to others about our faith," was the comment. We do have a terrible time with that word "evangelism" and even more with the concept that we should leave the safety and security of our buildings to engage others with the Good News. More likely than not, our "outreach committees" plan meals for the poor and our church's presence at community events, splendid things in themselves, but the very thought that we have a responsibility to speak about Jesus and the reality of God's reign scares us to death, or perhaps worse, offends our sensibilities. After all, religion should not be the subject of polite conversation!

In today's gospel we find Jesus praying to Abba God to give his disciples protection once Jesus is out of the picture. Note that Jesus doesn't ask God to restore the kingdom of Israel. Divine protection is to be something other than security: The Spirit is to protect and energize. But what on earth is the Spirit? The disciples, as devout Jews, know who God is, and they know Jesus. Perhaps they remember that in the Genesis account of Creation, the Spirit broods on the waters and cooperates in that new creation. The Church would come to believe that Jesus was present in Creation – "through him all things were made," as the Nicene Creed puts it – but as yet these frightened followers of Jesus know nothing of the power of the Spirit as the Spirit cooperates with Jesus in a "new creation," the reign of God on earth, of which we are now citizens through baptism.

Pentecost will change all that, but our narrative isn't there yet.

This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing. Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.

Instead we share the disciples' insecurity
and huddle in the little kingdoms we term "churches."
We hope and pray that others will join us, people who like the way we do things
and will help pay to replace or at least shore up our aging heating system.
We hope they will access our website, read the rector's blog,
or the advertisement lost among so many others on the church page of the newspaper,
or be attracted by the sign outside the church that tells them
that the Episcopal Church is there for them.
Nothing yet pushes us out through our red doors into the marketplace
to tell the Good News that Jesus transforms and makes all things new.
It's hard being a believer in a rational, scientific world;
we don't want people to think we're overly enthusiastic,
not like *those* people down the street.

Ironic, really, that last statement.
enthusiasm has as its root the words *en theos*, meaning spirit or God filled.
Funny thing not to want to be,
not to want the flames of the Spirit to rest on us,
not to want Jesus to breathe the Spirit into us,
not to want to know the power of the Spirit working in us,
doing more than we can ask or imagine.

Will this year's Pentecost make any difference?
Or once we have approved the parish profile
will we wait for the new messiah...I mean the next rector...
to come and usher in the reign of God for us,
to return us to some idealized point in history when all was peace and prosperity,
to accomplish that long evangelistic list and grow the church?

Let us pray instead that our parish will be renewed by God the Holy Spirit,
who always shows us Jesus and through him brings us to the Creator.

Let us also pray that each of us in our own way will hear Jesus
telling us to go out beyond our own comfort zone to tell out the glory of the Lord.

The disciples feared being killed.
We fear ridicule or discomfort.
So perhaps our prayer should be that God will remove from us
our fear of seeming ridiculous, our embarrassment at being people of faith,
and replace these with courage to live out our baptismal promises.
To paraphrase today's reading from Acts:
"Be witnesses for Christ in Red Wing, in all Goodhue County,
and to the ends of the earth"—
that would be Wisconsin.

Or shall we sit in our upper room and wait for a kingdom?

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