

7th Sunday of Easter

Text: Acts 1:6-14; John 17:1-11

Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.

May 4, 2008

“Knowing It All”

Today *MIGHT* be the day! We don't know for sure - and in Acts it says “it is not for us to know the time.” So it just *MIGHT* be today that the Lord returns. We just read that “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” So - it *MIGHT* be today.

Wouldn't that be *EXCITING*? Wouldn't that be *SCARY*? What if Jesus *WERE* to return - *TODAY*? In Acts we read how Jesus Ascended into heaven because his work here was done. And in the Gospel of John we read Jesus' prayer where he asks his Father to protect us so that as he and the Father are one - *WE* may also be one. (Looking up again) *WAIT JESUS!* Don't come yet! We're still working on it!

Why is it that, after all these years, we still can't get it down? We - the Christians - Christ's *CHURCH* - can't get united as One? In the Political Arena we've been hearing conflicts between Obama and his Pastor. Then we've been hearing arguments between Pastor Write and the other Black Preachers who claim that his statement does not represent the Black Church. Then I start to wonder - why *IS* there a “Black” Church. In the past few weeks at our Lutheran Seminary down Germantown Pike there have been strong discussions about them not including traditions from the “Black” Church into their worship life. When Jesus left this earth he prayed that we may all be one as he and the Father are one. Why can't we just have *ONE* Church- *Christ's* Church? *WAIT JESUS!* Don't come yet! We're still working on it!

One Sunday morning nine-year-old Joshua decided to skip church and go for a long walk. His mother frequently told him that if he skipped church, he would miss a chance to see Jesus. But Joshua had been going to church his whole life and had never seen Jesus there before, so he didn't think he'd be missing much. Besides, his church was an old, small, run-down building—just a little too confining for his desire to run and play.

Joshua's walk took him across the railroad tracks in town for the first time in his life. He noticed that the houses on the other side of the tracks were much bigger and much nicer than any in the poor neighborhood where he lived. A few blocks later Joshua found himself in front of the biggest, most beautiful church he had ever seen. The steeple alone seemed as tall as a mountain. As he got closer, the big church bells stopped ringing and the last people filed in from the parking lot. They all had nice cars and wore nice clothes. He didn't see any people from his side of the tracks going to this church. “This must be the church where Jesus goes,” Joshua told himself. “It's so big and nice.”

As he walked closer, he could hear the music coming from inside. He remembered hearing his mother talk about how angels sing to Jesus in heaven. “Wow!” Joshua said as he listened to the choir. “I’ll bet those are angels singing to Jesus!” He walked up the steps, through the big front doors, and into the spacious lobby. He continued through another set of doors and entered the sanctuary. It was the biggest room he had ever seen. “This must be where Jesus is!” Joshua whispered to himself.

He noticed an empty seat a few rows from the back, so he sat down to scan the crowd, so he could find Jesus. The choir stopped singing and a large man in a black suit tapped Joshua on the shoulder. The man leaned down and asked Joshua if he could speak with him outside. In the lobby, the man asked, “Son, where do you live?” Joshua answered, “Well, if you go down the hill, take a left at the corner, cross the railroad tracks, and head down that street a few more blocks, that’s where I live.” “And where are your parents?” the man asked. “They’re probably at church right now,” Joshua replied. “Well, son, don’t you think it would be better for you to go to your parents’ church today?” “But I saw this church, and I knew Jesus was here,” Joshua said. “So I came to see him!” “Well, son, I think it would be best if you were to run along home and go see Jesus in your own church in your own neighborhood,” the man said. “You really can’t stay here.”

Realizing what the man was trying to do, Joshua got upset. “You just don’t want me to see Jesus!” he yelled as he turned and ran out the big doors leading to the street. Crying as he returned home, Joshua shouted, “God, it isn’t fair! All I wanted to do was see Jesus, and they wouldn’t let me in!” Joshua shuffled along, staring at the sidewalk through his tears. Suddenly he heard footsteps behind him and felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around, wiped his eyes, and stared in amazement. It was Jesus! The Lord smiled at Joshua, gave him a big hug, and said, “Don’t be too upset, my son. They wouldn’t let me in there either.”

Few things have hurt the spread of the gospel more than Christians’ lack of unity. The reason we have so many churches today is not because we have so many people who want to attend, but that we don’t like worshipping with people who think, look or act different from us.

In Jesus’ prayer from the 23rd verse in John he says, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” If we can love each other, worship with each other, and serve with each other as brothers and sisters—regardless of our color, economic status—sexuality or which side of the tracks we live on - the world will find the gospel irresistible. Jesus wants us to do this with the entire WORLD - and we are still struggling to do this within the Church. WAIT JESUS! Don’t come yet! We’re still working on it!

How can we be One with the World when we can’t be One with one another? There was once an old monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Centuries earlier, it had been a thriving center where many dedicated monks lived and worked and had great influence on the realm.

But now only five monks lived there, and they were all over seventy years old. This was clearly a dying order. A few miles from the monastery lived an old hermit who many thought was a prophet.

One day as the monks agonized over the impending demise of their order, they decided to visit the hermit to see if he might have some advice for them. Perhaps he would be able to see the future and show them what they could do to save the monastery. The hermit welcomed the five monks to his hut, but when they explained the purpose of their visit, the hermit could only commiserate with them. “Yes, I understand how it is,” said the hermit. “The spirit has gone out of the people. Hardly anyone cares much for the old things anymore.” “Is there anything you can tell us,” the abbot inquired of the hermit, “that would help us save the monastery?” “No, I’m sorry,” said the hermit. “I don’t know how your monastery can be saved. The only thing that I can tell you is that one of you is an apostle of God.”

The monks were both disappointed and confused by the hermit’s cryptic statement. They returned to the monastery, wondering what the hermit could have meant by the statement, “One of you is an apostle of God.” For months after their visit, the monks pondered the significance of the hermit’s words. “One of us is an apostle of God,” they mused. “Did he actually mean one of us monks here at the monastery? That’s impossible. We are all too old. We are too insignificant. On the other hand, what if it’s true? And if it is true, then which one of us is it?”

One monk’s contemplation was similar to the four others’: “Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant the abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man—a man of wisdom and light. He couldn’t have meant Brother Elred. Elred gets crotchety at times and is difficult to reason with. On the other hand, he is almost always right. Maybe the hermit did mean Brother Elred. But surely he could not have meant Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, so shy—a real nobody. Still, he’s always there when you need him. He’s loyal and trustworthy. Yes, he could have meant Phillip. Of course, the hermit didn’t mean me. He couldn’t possibly have meant me. I’m just an ordinary person. Yet, suppose he did? Suppose I am an apostle of God? Oh God, not me. I couldn’t be that important to you. Or could I?”

As they continued to mull the hermit’s words, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the chance that one of them might actually be an apostle of God. And on the off chance that he himself might be the apostle spoken of by the hermit, each monk began to treat himself with extraordinary respect. Because the monastery was situated in a beautiful forest, many people came there to picnic on its tiny lawn and to walk on its paths, and even now and then to go into the tiny chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed the aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out of them, permeating the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it.

Hardly knowing why, people began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends. As more and more visitors came, some of the younger men started to talk with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. Within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order. This all began to happen AFTER they shared a unity - in together - being an apostle of God.

John 17 records Jesus' prayer to his Father for the church—for you and me. He asked that all of us would be one so that the world might believe. When we care for each other and treat each other with love and respect, then those in the world find the church to be attractive, even compelling. The world needs to stop fighting and hurting each other and be one body in Christ..... THEN we can say - "Okay Lord, we're ready!" Amen.