



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jami Anderson, May 8, 2011

“One day Groucho Marx, a comedian, was getting off an elevator and happened to meet a clergyman. The man came up to Groucho, put out his hand and said, “I want to thank you sir for all the joy you’ve put into the world.” Groucho shook hands, nodded, and replied, “And I’d like to acknowledge, reverend, all of the joy you’ve taken out of it!”

Sad to say, this story brings a smile or chuckle because of the truth found in how many people view clergy, Christianity, and even God. We are serious, serious, serious, and the fun is not in us. We are hypocrites, we can become pompous and judgmental. It might appear to others that Jesus came to say, “Sorrow be with you” – rather than peace be with you.

That seems to be the attitude of the two men walking to Emmaus after the crucifixion. They are sad, downcast, talking about the emotional upheaval and tragic ending of the last few days in their lives. And let’s admit – they have reason to feel the way they do. Just as we have days/times when we are sad, lonely, confused, longing to escape – to get away or at least find something to do that provides us with comfort. I can be right there with these two disciples. I’d leave town. I’d find a friend to talk things through with me.

And look where Jesus is!!! Right there with them – unrecognized, unknown, finding them even when they are in the midst of retreat from the world. He’s there, walking beside them!

And he comes to them as a stranger – a stranger – not someone known or comfortable. Not someone in the know or with authority. But whether the disciples were beyond caring or too overwhelmed – still they shared their sorrow and predicament with Him. They talked to Jesus and he responded and began to put their world back together again. He connected their world and their experiences within the broad story of scripture – with God’s story – with the unfolding story that continues still.

And their hearts burned within them and they did not ignore or dismiss what they felt and heard. They invited Jesus to spend more time with them. Much has been written about Jesus behaving as if he intended to go on further from the two disciples. I believe the message given to them and to us is that Jesus will never force himself into your life – he must be invited. He must be invited. Even when he’s walking right beside us – it is up to us to talk and share and ask and invite and respond and slow down for some time spent together - trusting enough to demonstrate hospitality to a stranger.

And in the offering of that hospitality – God’s presence is known. They recognize Jesus and their sorrow is turned to joy! To Joy! Joy which they share – joy which they spread around

immediately. They return to Jerusalem. They burst in on the others with their glad news. They abandon their sorrow and rejoice. They learn that Jesus is alive and traveling with them and feeding them and sending them out with the message of Easter. Christ is alive.

In the book of John, as Jesus was saying good-bye to his disciples he promised them joy. He told them that when he left, his joy would be with us and our joy would be complete. The completion is here. Christ is alive and returned and living with us and delighting in us and feeding us.

Here's the Good News for today:

- The Lord meets us in unexpected places, even when retreating, even when we don't recognize Him, even when we are not an important or named disciple.
- It is important for us to honor the stranger in our midst and share with them and listen to their story.
- Recognizing God's presence is often a fleeting, elusive, transitory experience. It is a glimpse in the breaking of the bread – it is a heart burning within us.
- When we experience God's presence it is a gift to be shared, not something to keep private.
- And Easter is a part of our lives forever.

So may the joy of the risen and present Christ fill you to overflowing, blessing you and blessing others, flowing out into the world with the peace that passes all understanding. For our God is here with us, ready to laugh with us, ready to heal us, ready to share a resurrection life.

Thanks be to God.

So this guy dies and goes to heaven and St. Peter takes him down the hall past a number of doors and then St. Peter stops and says, "You have to be very quiet going past that door. That's where the Episcopalians are, and they like to think they're the only ones here."

May it not be so – now or forever. Alleluia, alleluia.