

Acting with One Heart & Soul

Sharing is messy. Easter I was going to do a children's sermon & use a pecan log as illustration. You can imagine, it can get sticky messy quickly!

Well, the kind of sharing that the early church experienced in our reading from Acts today was like that. It started out fine – best intentions, great system, great love ... but then, things get messy and it wasn't long before having all things in common was abandoned by the early church – with some notable experiments with the system throughout the ages, included the Amana Colonies – who were a group of German pietists who managed more or less to work out a communal, communistic society for about 80 years. The Amana name comes from the biblical book, The Song of Solomon and means “to remain true,” and the Amana colonists were not Amish. I got to thinking about biblical communism and the Amana communism with today's reading, and then low and behold I read this article in the Quad City Times about a republican congressman from Florida, Allen West, who just last week, claimed that 75 plus members of the House of Representatives are members of the communist party. It reminded me of Bob Hope's joke during the McCarthy era of the “Red Scare”, — Hope said “Everybody's afraid of being called a 'Red.' I cut myself shaving and was afraid to bleed” — I personally think communism is a wonderful system – it just doesn't work on earth; in the meantime, we need to find the best way to be of one heart and soul on this side of the river – let's begin with a word of prayer:

To be of one heart and soul, I think the key is to be found in our Gospel reading for today. It comes from, FIRST, being convinced, as Thomas was, of the reality of Jesus; and, SECOND, from practicing using the breath of the Holy Spirit we've been given.

FIRST, we need to be convinced, as Thomas had to be convinced, of the reality of Jesus. Thomas may not have been from Missouri, but like many of us, Thomas had that Missourian philosophy of “show me.” There are things that we may believe, such as that there are pretty buildings in Moscow with funny, colorful, onion-shaped domes; but our belief has very little effect on our daily lives.

On the other hand, if we became CONVINCED, that funny, onion-colored domes were the key to our happiness, it would make a great deal of difference in how we live our lives. Thomas had to be shown the nail prints in Jesus' hands and the piercing in Jesus' side – we don't have that as an option, so what do we need to be shown not just to believe, but to be convinced that our relationship with Jesus can bring us happiness in our lives?

A self-confessed, non-religious person once asked me for proof that Jesus saves, so I sent him a cartoon showing Jesus clipping coupons. Well, if that doesn't do it for you, how about the good that people seeking to follow Jesus do.

Now, first of all, I want to distinguish between people following the Church and people Church do good things, but just as often they do bad things – wars and persecutions immediately come to mind: both of which Jesus explicitly rejects – both formally by words as well as by his actions.

Yet, people seeking to follow Jesus have done remarkable things: like advocating for an end to slavery, reforming our prisons, abolishing child labor, establishing hospitals and public schools – the list goes on and on. More than that, people seeking to follow Jesus have reached out to others different from themselves and offered love in many tangible and intangible ways, and so have altered the course of the universe; because some of those people who would otherwise have ended their lives brought the world great light and hope and freedom.

If you want to be shown Jesus, talk to a recovering alcoholic, because AA was founded on Christian principles by Christians trying to follow Jesus and do the right thing by their fellows who were suffering so.

If you want to see Jesus, look at MCC.

Where can you find intellectually honest bible teaching from an historical-critical perspective, that holds up the Gospel to what we find in our newspaper? Rich trying to follow Jesus at MCC QC

Where can you find blended worship that seeks to integrates the best of liberal, evangelical, humanistic, and ritual traditions? The worship team, trying to follow Jesus at MCC QC.

Where can you celebrate the fullness and integration of your sexuality and your spirituality? Here, where we're trying to follow Jesus at MCC QC.

Where can you allow yourself to think and feel and question as you deepen your spiritual search? Here, where we're trying to follow Jesus at MCC QC.

Where are all people welcome at the Communion table regardless of their beliefs, doubts, or religious affiliation? Here at MCC QC.

Where are loads of non-perishable food items collected each year for families in need of a hand? Here at MCC QC.

Where can you consistently hear positive messages that affirm the sacred value of all people? Here at MCC QC.

Where will you be challenged to believe in yourself, care about others, work for justice, practice generosity, and continue to grow spiritually? Here at MCC QC.

Where can you learn about the dangers to LBGT people in Jamaica, Malaysia, Uganda, Nigeria, and other parts of the world? Here at MCC QC.

Where can you find a voice speaking out for marriage equality? Here at MCC QC.

Where is religion fun, spirituality relevant, and community built? Here at MCC QC.

Where can you find 12 Step groups, information about AIDS Project, Quad Cities Affirming Diversity, giving for Moline Rescue Center and for Safer Foundation and people every month feeding the hungry? Here at MCC QC.

MCC QC is a different kind of church where you and your spiritual journey are welcome. We are not always of one heart and soul – but we seek to be; I hope you see Jesus here -- won't you join us, as we seek to show Jesus to our world?

Once you become convinced of the reality of Jesus, SECOND, it is up to us to practice using the breath of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave us.

After a long journey, a seeker reached the bank of the mythic river, saw a sage on the other side, and called out, "How do I get across?"

The sage replied, "You are across." You are across.

Hear this reading from Acts Chapter 2, verses 32-35:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Please rise in body or spirit as you are able for the reading of the Good News. From John 20:19-31:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As our God has sent me, so I send you."

When Jesus had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Child of God, and that through believing you may have life in Jesus' name.

Here ends the readings.