

Sixth Sunday of Easter
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Sunday, May 9, 2010
Trinity Lutheran Evangelical Church

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67;
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29

I had the opportunity a few weeks ago to go up onto the roof of the church. Now I assure you that I did not go there to avoid work or hide out in any way! A member of the property committee was showing a contractor around and invited me to come along. While they discussed the scope of work needed for the man's estimate, I was afforded some time to walk around the flat roof of the education wing and go up on top of this roof as well.

There are two things that came to mind during my time up there. The first was the awareness of being able to see for miles in every direction. This awareness makes one feel very big. The parking lot looks small, the houses look like stepping stones and cars look like toys that are unable to hurt you.

Seeing over the tops of the tall trees makes you feel like a giant. Like the king of the world! This first experience of feeling is a paradox to the second that also comes to mind. That is true because along with the exhilaration of being a giant, you can also look around from the peak and realize how small you are.

The world is going on all around, in busy, modern fashion. People are running errands, cars zip by, people busy in their yards, riding bikes or jogging, and others are closed inside their homes. Some involved in careers, volunteering, interviewing, and the list goes on and on.

Taking all of that in from on top of the high roof of the church can make you feel very small, even miniscule to the workings of the world as you peruse the landscape. At the same time you feel gigantic and miniscule.

This must have been the feeling experienced by the disciples gathered around Jesus that day as he promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. The devoted group, though not perfect, on the one hand feeling blessed to be receiving the Holy Spirit must have felt gigantic.

Jesus said the Advocate will teach, remind, and give peace. That would make me feel as though on top of the world. And then on the other hand, did not the thought of abandonment occur to them?

Jesus was leaving and they could not go with him. He was talking in riddles and other worldly meaning that made the disciples totally mystified. Jesus said, "I am going away and I am coming to you." Jesus tells them this ahead of time, before it occurs, so that they may believe.

Many did come to believe when they encountered Jesus after his resurrection, but they could see him, touch him, and eat with him.

So, how are we to believe being removed from that physical contact? How do we believe when a part of us desires to be in control, self-sufficient, and feel gigantic while at the same time reflect on our humanity, limits, and weaknesses?

Let us look to see how people came to believe in the Gospel of John.

In verse 29 of our text this morning we read, "And now I have told you this before it occurs so that when it does occur, you may believe." Jesus says this to the entire group there with the second person plural. The "you" that means "you all".

Jesus makes a prophecy about future belief happening to them.

Jesus will bring belief to them in the future by fulfilling prophecy. In chapter 4:8, Jesus tells a royal official, who is seeking out Jesus to heal his son. Jesus said, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." Jesus knows the royal official needs a miracle to believe, so Jesus heals his son and the man believes. Jesus performs a miracle because that is what the royal official needs to believe.

In John 8:24, Jesus said, "I told you that you would die in your sin unless you believe that I am he." Here Jesus declares his unity with the father and many listening that day were given belief.

Here Jesus uses the word of God in proclamation in order to bring belief to people. Three ways so far, prophecy, miracle, and proclamation that brings belief to people.

The fourth way that people are given belief comes in John 11:15 and connects to our text this morning. In this account Jesus is told that Lazarus is dead and Jesus said, "For your sake, I am glad I was not there so that you may believe." The belief in this instance will come to people, and even to us, in those times when we sense Jesus' absence.

People come to believe even when they feel alone, abandoned, or at rock bottom. These are the moments in our life when we feel miniscule. Like what the disciples must have felt when Jesus told them he was leaving.

Who will be with us? Who can take your place Jesus?

This sending of belief to us from God reminds me of a time when a grown man told an account of his life. He, a child of divorced parents, did not know of a time when his parents were married. His mom and dad divorced when he was an infant. One summer during his early teenage years he went to visit his father for a few weeks. The days were good and they passed quickly. Soon came the time for him to go home with his mom. He sat in the passenger seat and looked out the windshield as his mother began to back out of the driveway the young man's eyes locked on his father's. He said, in that moment, while sitting next to his mother he began to weep. Even though fifteen years had passed since the divorce of his parents, it was not until then that the reality and emotion hit him. Now years after that experience

he talks about how he came to equate God to the loving and protecting mother that cared and sacrificed for him daily. To the man, God was maternal... motherly. Yet he still felt alone and vulnerable and needed to grieve. As all of the emotion played out in the car that day, his mother witnessed her child weep.

Could it be that the boy even though in the presence of his mother (whom he embodied as God) felt abandoned? I say, "Yes". And we do too, at times in our lives. We are aware of God's presence around us and yet have times of feeling abandoned, alone, and small.

This is precisely the time when Jesus reminds us we will be given belief. We get belief from proclamation, miracle, and community.

The sacraments also deliver belief to people. A mother's love given in a healthy, Godly way can be like a sacrament, grounded in physical matter and delivered by the Spirit.

Mothers in this worship space have shown that kind of unconditional love and children and adults have been given belief because of you.

Therefore, what God wants us all to know from the account in the gospel is that the Holy Spirit is with us and providing belief to us, for us. And even when we grieve the absence of someone...even when we grieve the absence of God, in those moments the Holy Spirit reveals God and our hearts are not to be troubled or even cowardly. Indeed the power of God is with you-Rejoice, Believe, and Love!

Amen.