

I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing

Based on 1 John 3:1-7

It had been a most astounding few weeks for the disciples, and those most close to Jesus. The dramatic events of Holy Week, a gripping crucifixion, hushed disbelief that things could have gone so wrong, stunning news that Christ was alive, and most recently, mysterious visits through locked doors. But what would these same events have sounded like, to Mr. & Mrs. Smith, living miles away from Jerusalem, in a quiet little gathering of homes in a dusty gully, far away from the uproar in the city, hardly a dot on the map as far as the Romans were concerned, not even a place to stop for those on pilgrimage. There were no telephones, no Canada Post, no Instagram messages, no 'selfies' with Jesus on Facebook. News would have travelled slowly, and as all good tales along the trail, would have changed shaped and detail with each telling. Some days, or weeks later, news would have arrived that Christ had been executed, and later still, some garbled tale of Jesus being alive, and seen here and there.

As we read last week, it was difficult enough for those there, in Jerusalem, to believe what they were seeing with

their own eyes. How much more difficult, then, for Mr. & Mrs. Smith to make any sense of these outrageous stories they begun to hear.

As modest, quiet believers of Jesus' message, they pretty much kept to themselves about their beliefs. No need to rock the boat in their little corner of the world. And considering some of the stories they had been hearing, about Roman soldiers scouting the area, looking to squash any more resistance or proclamations about a Messiah, one can imagine that Mr. & Mrs. Smith kept their faith matters rather close to their chest, and their mouths zipped shut for a while.

But time never stands still. Weeks became months. Months became years. The stories died down after a time, and the Romans became distracted with other political agendas. It was safe, after a time, for the disciples to gather again. But new

questions were not long coming. What do we do next? Are we finished, washed up? Do we keep on with this movement Christ started? And if we do, how do we organize? Who will lead? How do we gather the Mr. & Mrs. Smith's from all over the countryside together? How do we even find out who the faithful are, and where they all live?

And as if those questions were not difficult enough, they brought to mind even more challenging ones. Just who is a faithful believer? Christ welcomed people from all walks of life, not just the Jewish people. He welcomed Romans (seen as the enemy), children, prostitutes, the sick, the wealthy from high society, and the poorest widows. Just who would be the 'Children of God' in this new enterprise, this 'church' the disciples were creating from Jesus' inspiration? What were the requirements for someone to become 'One of the Faithful'? A proper Jewish pedigree? No scandal in the family history; no illegitimate children, no criminals? Living on the right side of the tracks (and which side was that, the right or the left)?

It may seem like a rather simple answer now, but at its beginning, these were controversial questions, with serious implications for what this new 'church' might look

like. At the same time, muddying the holy catholic waters even further, was the Apostle Paul, busy at work in just as scandalous an enterprise in nearby Mediterranean cities. Paul suggested that 'other people', gentiles, people of other races, cultures, languages and customs even women, might also come to believe, and be called 'Children of God!' What was the world coming to?

The writer of 1 John settled the matter, as far as he was concerned. What does one need to do, to be a 'Child of God'? Believe. For those who have seen Christ in the flesh. For those who have not. Trust in Him. And in time, the answers will be clear.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (v1)

My friends, change is not a new thing for the church. Growing pains of great controversy stem from our very beginnings. And the anxiety, of becoming something meaningful, lasting, and life changing, is seen clearly at Verse 4, where the tone quickly changes. "Gather in, believers," the writer of 1 John might have said. "As a mother quail extends her

wings to gather her chicks, we the church gather the Children of God together. BUT DO NOT SIN!!!" Wow! (and it gets worse from Verse 8 on!)

Let's not get sidetracked. The church of Mr. & Mrs. Smith's day was taking shape. And while there was much debate about who was invited, and who would lead, the writer of 1 John was clear: if we are to be a group with a message that is worthy, that is more than just a feel-good moment for the day, then we have to look different, act different, and live differently. We have to show the world what it means to be a follower of Christ. We have to walk the walk, and talk the talk.

Our world today is just as challenging as the world of the first century church. In a day that no longer requires church participation to be part of the social fabric, the wise church is asking itself once again, "What does it mean to be a Child of God?" Are we a church that behaves like that mother quail and gathers the flock together? Are we a church which raises our finger (literally or secretly) and cries loudly, "Do not sin?" Are we a church which welcomes everyone, or do we quietly select those who are more welcome than

others? Are we a church that walks the walk, and talks the talk?

These days, the world seems to have given tacit approval for people to hold onto to more polarized opinions, of other people and their beliefs, and their lifestyles. I would suggest that it is more important than ever to recognize the need for the Children of God, to act like, the Children of God: welcoming, understanding, interested, and compassionate. I would like the 'world to sing in perfect harmony' and part of that harmony comes from me, trusting that I am a Child of God, and sharing with the world, what it means to be a child of God, to tell the stories of grace and love as opportunities unfold in my daily walk; sharing how my strength and courage come from trusting that Christ has my back. This is not a new thing for believers. It has been the way of our walk since the very beginning, a worthy ambition for The Children of God: Mr. & Mrs. Smith, you, and me.

*I'd like to see the world for once all standing hand in hand
And hear them echo through the hills for peace through out the land*