

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Since Jesus Came Into My Heart"

Based on Revelations 21:1-5

I have always been amazed that each time our church finds itself at a perceived point of great schism (I love that word!), a time of vigorous debate, a great line to be drawn in the sand which will tear us apart and destroy all that was good...when the dust settles and the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth has simmered down, we discover that for all our noise, God was simply trying to show us another branch on the tree of life; another way to love; another way to see the great and endless beauty of His creation(s).

But those first generations of apostles, who carried the torch of faith after the resurrection, presented an idea so radical, so preposterous, so out of touch with reality, that it makes all the great debates of the church through history: the trinity, transubstantiation, the role of women in leadership, and gender identity all pale in comparison. For the apostles suggested that, *God's dwelling place [was] now among the people, and he*

[would] dwell with them. They [would] be his people, and God himself [would] be with them and be their God. (v3).

Scandalous! Blasphemous! Heresy!

WHAT A
WONDERFUL
CHANGE IN MY
LIFE HAS BEEN
WROUGHT
SINCE JESUS
CAME INTO MY
HEART;

~ Rufus McDaniel

Well if this sounds like rather blasé, Christianity 101 kind of news to you, you are not alone. But in those early days of Christian thinking, before there really was an organized church, as we would understand it today, this was an idea that caused great uproar among thinkers and temple goers of the day. It's really no surprise that many of those first apostles found their careers cut short because of prison sentences, burning at the stake, or woke up without their head one morning.

The months after the resurrection were a time of great confusion. But as the unbelievable story of the empty tomb became old news, and the demands of day to day routines slipped back into place, the apostles regrouped to consider their options.

- They could all go home, return to their families, and pretend the last three years were just a dream; a good dream, but just a dream.
- They could round up their supporters and quiet believers and continue their work here and there, around kitchen tables and living rooms. But how long would that last?
- They could go big! They could take a giant leap of faith, and pick up where Jesus left off. They could become the next generation of leaders. Yes, they could do it! But what about money to finance the operation? What about the Jewish priests? What about the Romans? Were the apostles really ready for a possible repeat of Passover and Calvary?

If this whole Christianity thing was really going to become a 'thing', a viable ministry based on the teachings of Jesus, then

this organization needed to get bigger. This proposed Christian Church needed to find a way to squeeze into the existing Jewish faith community, and it do it without incurring too much anger, or attention of the Jewish or Roman authorities. They needed believers, bodies in the pews, willing hearts and faithful disciples. But where to find them?

As the apostles considered the logistics and the financial realities of starting a 'church', they considered too, how Jesus had managed to address the same problems in His leadership. The apostles realized: they had been thinking too small! For Jesus, it had always been about the people:

all people,
all kinds of people,
sick people, rich
people,
servants, slaves,
children, women,
Jew, gentile,
saint, sinner.

It had never been about race or gender or status with Jesus. It had been about the people. He, God Incarnate, had lived and walked among the people, all people. He ministered to everyone, healed all who asked, took time to sit children on his knee, and treated slaves with the same dignity as the wealthy dinner host or Roman Centurion.

- Jesus was God.
- God had come from heaven, to be with His people.

- And because of Jesus, God continued to live within the hearts of all people.
- God was not just in heaven. God was here. Now. Forever.

And there my friends, was the most radical thought to ever be presented to the believing community in ancient times, because this was simply not the way the faith community understood God at all.

"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (v5) "God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them." (v3)

No longer was God up there in the heavens, unapproachable and untouchable. As Jesus had walked the earth, and held hands with the frail and elderly, and giggled with a child as she told a silly story, so the love of God continues to live here, within each of us: touchable, approachable.

Many years have passed since those early years of the Christian church, floundering to make its place in the world. We are the benefactors of the work and faith and tenacity of those early apostles. And our protestant denomination hinges on this 'radical' idea of God within: ever present, ever ready. It is a guiding principal for our faith journey, a source of comfort on rainy days and when making difficult decisions.

But we live in a world, where for many, God seems as unapproachable, as unreachable, as unattainable an idea as it did for those first generations of believers. It is not always that the world out there is not interested in religion or faith, or church.

- For some, it is a belief that they are unworthy, because of past decisions, choices, or dilemmas.
- For some, it is the belief that God is so far out of reach that there is no way He could possibly understand the mess one finds themselves in right here, right now.
- For some, it is a fear to enter the doors of a church, for they might be turned away: by those inside, or by God Himself.

It is a sobering thought, to consider that for all our efforts to 'reach out' to the world, so many feel that God is still 'out of reach.'

May we consider the gentle ways that we might share the news of Revelations with others...

Yesterday is done. And today is not yet finished. (v1)

There is One who can wipe tears away, and erase the past. (v1)

He is not out of reach. He is here. Now. (v3)

This is a new day. (v5)

"These words are trustworthy and true." (v5)

Amen.