

# MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY APRIL 25, 2021

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## “Bring Them In!”

Based on John 10:11-18

*Bring them in, bring them in,  
Bring them in from the fields of  
sin;*

*Bring them in, bring them in,  
Bring the wandering ones to  
Jesus.*

~ Alexcenah Thomas

It's the gospel revival kind of hymn my Great-Grand-Daddy would have liked to sing, as he sat in the fence row whiling away the hours while the cattle waited patiently to be milked and his Great-Grandma fumed as supper burned on the stove.

*“Bring the wandering ones to  
Jesus.”*

It was an interesting question for the disciples to ruminate upon. The faithful followers of those post-resurrection days enjoyed a window of time where the tension of the Holy Week events had eased and the attention of the powerful had been directed elsewhere.

As far as the Roman authorities were concerned, the crucifixion of that rabble-rouser Jesus had taken care of any possible uprising, so life could return to normal. As far as the religious authorities were concerned, the tall tale of an empty tomb three days after Good Friday, was just that, a tall tale fabricated by ignorant villagers. The unspoken agreement was,

that whatever this Messianic Movement might have been, it would only take a few months for the stories and the followers to move on to more interesting things. Case closed.

But as history has shown, this is not what happened. For the faithful, this window of time allowed them to quietly gather, to sing and pray together; to discuss the future:

- Who would be in charge?
- What they wanted to do?
- Where they wanted to go with their message?

We know from other scripture lessons, that the whole question of who was to be in charge was of concern. But, I think, equally important, was the question, “Who was going to be involved? Who was going to be welcome in this growing menagerie of believers and seekers and sinners, and curious?”

It would be nice to think that everyone gathered around the table and welcomed anyone who knocked at the door and asked to join the prayer meeting. But life is seldom quite so simple. Remember, these believers around the table planning corporate expansion were the same believers who only a few weeks before, had hid in underground cellars for fear of their life, had

denied knowing Christ, or initially, had not believed the story of his resurrection. If you wanted to suggest that only the ‘most faithful’, those who had stuck by Christ through thick and thin, could be allowed in this new venture, then the early church would have only included a few women: those who had remained at the foot of the cross, weeping, on Good Friday.

The shock and horror of Good Friday had changed people. It not only changed the disciples and the followers most close to the situation, it changed the whole Jewish community on a fundamental level. After the story of the resurrection began to circulate, others began to think upon, or re-think about matters of faith, of the messages of Christ, of their desire to believe in this hope.

The question for those in charge became: Should everyone be allowed to enter this new era of the developing church?

- Could they be trusted?
- Would they be committed to the cause?
- Would they follow the rules?
- What were the rules?
- Who should be let into the club, and who should be excluded?

For guidance about 'who' to welcome into the club, the faithful turned to a time in Jesus' ministry before the politics and the power struggles of Jerusalem had clouded things, when Jesus was just a guy in a field, who had some interesting things to say about life and love and the pursuit of happiness.

*"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father— (v14,15)*

"I am faithful," said Christ. "I am easy to approach. I am committed for the long haul. I have a gentle heart, and the courage of a lion. I will listen to what you have to say. I will not let you down. You can believe in Me, because I believe in my Father. You are welcome here."

But then, here's where things get a little murky. Because then Christ went on to say,

*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (v16)*

So, I guess that meant that everyone was to be let into the club. It's something the church still wrestles with. We like to think that we welcome everyone with open arms, but...

- Our eyebrows go up a little when someone obviously living on the street joins us for worship.
- We are wary for a while, of those who come to us from

another church tradition that is not our own.

- I still remember the audible gasp from a congregation when a 'black' skinned stranger sat in Mrs. Brown's pew. (We later learned he had escaped from prison and was coming to church before he turned himself into the police, which makes this particular incident all the more amusing)

The honest answer is that we prefer church to be somewhat predictable.

- You are welcome as long as you do things our way. (whatever that is)
- You are welcome as long as you don't suggest too much change.
- You are welcome as long as you maintain your place in the unspoken pecking order of matriarchs and patriarchs who have been established here long before you.

This is not to say that we are bad people, or bad Christians. This is to say that the question of 'who is really welcome' and 'who is not as readily welcome' has always been something churches have wrestled with, since those post-resurrection days from so long ago. This is not a new struggle. But it is a struggle we should be mindful of.

Because the days are coming soon when COVID will lift, church life will resume, and we will begin to file back into our comfortable pews. Except things will be different. Some familiar faces and events will

return. Others will not. New faces will arrive also. Unexpected people will begin to arrive for worship and offer their helping hands and their willing hearts for unpredictable reasons.

Because COVID has fundamentally changed us all, just like the shock of Good Friday fundamentally changed believers and non-believers alike. Eyes have been opened where they were closed before, and hearts are longing for deeper meaning, where shallow relationships sufficed before. Hallelujah! God is good!

- Are we ready to welcome?
- Are we ready to welcome everyone?
- Are we ready to be surprised by who arrives, and not overwhelmed by those who do not?
- Are we ready to listen to new ideas, and maybe, let go of some outdated things?
- Are we ready to be 'one flock with one shepherd'?

The Spirit has been busy during COVID.

It has awakened us. It has awakened others. Are we ready?

*Bring them in, bring them in,  
Bring the wandering ones to  
Jesus.*