

When we gathered on Maundy Thursday, I mentioned the paradox of that first Communion supper. This meal undergirds our sense of community. It is one of our most complete and lasting expressions of God's nature and character – ours is a radically hospitable Creator. When we break the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the longevity of God's presence, love, and grace. And yet, we also read of disciples who weren't at their best, and did not display their best.

I don't think it's a stretch to say that the men who joined Jesus at the table acted like pretty lousy friends on Thursday night and Friday morning. Of course, they wouldn't be the only people in history to wound their close friends with actions of apathy, betrayal, and denial. It just so happens that it wasn't the best of weeks for the disciples to not be their best. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday reveal both the beauty and ugliness, the strength and frailty of the human experience.

The disciples spend Saturday hiding in shame. And a pretty large portion of Sunday morning dismissing the women of their own community for idol tales of resurrection. And even after other eye-witness accounts of the Risen One, they cling tight to the safety and anonymity of an upper room.

Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, we read about the courageous, perceptive, persistent women of Luke; Mary, and Mary, and Joanna among them, who were reminded by the angels not to look for Jesus among the dead, "for he is not here, but is risen." I mentioned to you that the women are able to witness the Easter story because they have been participating in the kin-dom of God. Their male counterparts are still waiting for its arrival, even though it's already in their midst. The spark of Easter has not yet become a flame.

This morning, we read from Acts 5, a continuation of Luke's Gospel – this is a recounting of the actions that Jesus' disciples will perform as the Apostles of Jesus. And the lectionary choice is a little strange, because we've leapfrogged the Pentecost story, that's the arrival of the Holy Spirit, in the first few chapters of Acts, and yet Pentecost is well over a month away. So please excuse me, I don't have a time machine, let alone a DeLorean, but we've got to go *Back to the Future* to understand the past and present.

In his earthly ministry, Jesus has a resurrecting and renewing quality, one that was especially apparent to the women in Luke. Jesus had a way of giving life to people who had been dead to living, and in this new kind of living...spirit, and purpose, and power, and love were abundant and accessible. Community members weren't living into what the establishment insisted they must be, but were instead choosing to live into what God had created them to be.

The umph, the substance, the logos that Jesus oozes in his ministry -- we've seen it elsewhere in Lady Wisdom and in the creative ruach of Genesis -- this umph, eventually resurrects itself, and ultimately manifests as the Holy Spirit in the Acts community.

Easter morning tells us that new life is possible. The season of Easter reveals this new life. Pentecost empowers us to be agents of new living.

We are aware. We experience. We participate and lead for ourselves.

During Holy Week, we were hanging out with disciples, at least male disciples, who still weren't really aware of all that Jesus was saying and doing. They were neophytes. Fast forward to today, and six or seven chapters, and we've met disciples, this time both men AND women,

who are not only aware of the work of Jesus, but have experienced it for themselves, and are now moving that work forward with their own gifts and voices.

The disciples once sat at a table with a man who gave them everything he had – his time, his presence, his love, his service, his every vulnerability. And what's more, he knew every part of their humanity – the good, and the not-so-good – and he said this table, and my company, and my love are always for you, no matter who, what, when, where, or how you are.

But the voice of authority is loud, and scary, and uncomfortable. And somehow this voice told the disciples there was security beyond the table.

The disciples, again the men in this instance, were once groggy-eyed and grief-stricken on Sunday morning, and women, whom they knew and loved, brought them good news of great joy. But that voice of authority told them, "Don't trust the women. God is revealed only in the most powerful, in the highest places of prestige." And so they instinctively dismissed the message of their wise friends as idol chatter.

But something happened, I dare say just as remarkable as an empty tomb. Over the course of the Easter season, about 40 or 50 days, the stubborn, immovable stones that entombed their hearts in disbelief were rolled away. The umph, or the Spirit crept in. And though the physical Jesus wasn't with them, his spirit was! They recreated tables. And communities. And God's presence. They healed one another physically, and socially, and mentally, and emotionally, and theologically. They stopped trying to define kingdoms and started living into kin-doms.

And yes, Sardis this is a lot of setup for today's text, but I promise the payoff is quick.

Our Apostles stand in front of the council. The high priest is hot. *We told you not to tell this story, not to invoke the name of Jesus, not to teach, not to embolden this community of yours. The status quo is just fine, thank you very much.*

Part of me imagines that old priest sounded like the teacher from Peanuts speaking to the apostles about authority – a jumbled collection of nonsense sayings.

Filled and empowered by the Spirit, the apostles could think back clearly to a table. Here was a place to find belonging, community, and purpose. And they think back to women who shared authentic witness. What kind of world wants to silence such witnesses? And they remembered the community of healing, loving, and worship that emerged at Solomon's Portico. This was God's gathering, no matter if it wasn't stamped with the approval and formality of the Temple elite.

Don't talk about Jesus? Don't talk about Sunday? Don't listen to these remarkable women? Don't pay any attention to God's spirit, that thing we feel so palpably to be present, and active, and visible among us?

No thanks. That's just not possible in a post-Easter world. You can have your kingdom, because we're living in a kin-dom, and the ever-present living of God's kinship can never be threatened or ended by the fleeting and finite threats of kingdoms.

The apostles have been changed, resurrected, renewed, empowered, emboldened, “umphed” up. The Spirit has awoken their collective conscience, aligned it with their convictions, and catalyzed their living into loving. They are witnesses of the unfolding story in the same way Jesus first shared that story with them. And these bold witnesses are helping to write the chapters of the future.

Easter didn't end on Sunday night when Walgreen's put the candy on clearance. Easter is just getting started.

Sardis Baptist Church, we have a seat at the table. We have a community who bears witness. We have a Portico of our own healing, worshipful, soulful experiences. And there is a whole world full of councils out there telling us to make Easter a thing of the past.

This friends, is a season of observation, experience, and transformation. Listen to the witness among you. Be aware of the Easter reality. Let Easter grab ahold of you – find life at a table, or on a walk, or in the company of a stranger, or in the renewal of Spring. And wait, friends, wait with purpose for the Spirit to fall fresh upon us on Pentecost.

For it is our conscience, informed by experience, and emboldened by the Spirit, that will be a witness of God's enduring presence and love for the world. And that friends, is wise counsel for any council.

Amen.