

Sermon for 7 February 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Scriptures: Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c (UM859), 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

**“More”**

What is going on?

We've said this is probably the earliest written Gospel of Jesus. We've gathered from historical evidence that this was a terrible time for the early church: As Jews, they were under severe persecution by the Romans as rebels who wouldn't bow down and worship the Emperor ... one of the crazy ones like Caligula, under whom Rome was falling apart ...

We've pointed out that the young church in Jerusalem was probably wiped out soon after the Gospel of Mark was written ... that it was quite possibly a last gesture before the community fell apart, leaving only bits of followers in other parts of Palestine to survive and carry on... and that its aim was to deal with the bare, hard fact that Jesus wasn't coming back before the first generation of disciples and followers had died, by leaving some record believers could cling to when they met, on the first day of the week, rather than the Saturday Sabbath ...

...and here we are, in the first few paragraphs, watching a full-blown movement at work in village after village, stopping @ house after house...

It's as though we've dropped down into the middle of a story ... and the plot seems to be about Jesus, working wonders, healing, shushing demons as he runs them off ... and yet before any plans are laid, before anybody does anything but eat whatever is offered and then chase after Jesus, who doesn't seem concerned about organization, or future operations, but just says, "Hurry ... I must go on to all the towns and villages..."

We want more. We've got a crowd; sign 'em up (O yes, this is 1400 years before most people could read, there were no printing presses ... )

And as mature, 21<sup>st</sup>-century followers of Jesus Christ, most of us church members, nobody curiously looking in, no visible miracles to attract a following, we want to know.

We want more.

We say, "Give me that book. Show me where you're reading. What does it mean when he says .... " We always assume the writer is male ... and so you ask me to spend more time on the words.

What if I told you there are more words than you can ever hear, much less agree on, to this story? What if I say my job is to throw the ball back to you?

What if I told you my military son, the Army colonel, said to me last week he thinks it's wrong that he's already had both CoVid vaccinations and his 86-year-old dad still can't get his first shot?

My nephew who recently lost his wife ... we prayed for them ... told me he's now volunteering, as a retired nurse, where he lives on Bainbridge Island in Washington State, to give vaccinations ... and that they have three times the number of volunteers they need ...

We have people willing and wanting to do good things, remedial things, to improve the world more than ever before, and we have the science ...

There are resources, and techniques, and clear, agreed-on evidence that we can work together globally to feed everyone and heal all sorts of basic ills to the point that the world, in this century, could look and act like what we'd call heaven ... so that even death would look different, not like an end-point, but because we'd found nature so amazing and beautiful and trustworthy that lying down for the last time, or letting go for good, although still hard and grieving would accompany any permanent letting go, we would find ourselves passing over and passing through in ways beyond what we can even expect or describe now.

This is what we are called to hope, and work towards, not 200 years from now, and not after death as we know it, but together, in the foreseeable future. Less than 150 years ago our advanced part of the world didn't agree children needed to be schooled by public support. This year we are hearing, and speaking, as Blacks and whites, males and female, LGBT and straight, truth to power more than ever in human history.

We speak of it in church. We have stories to describe it. Scripture is full of them. We gather and repeat them, share them, weekly. We can't help but want more. We say we have to agree to make it work ... but I'm more convinced this year than ever before, and I've lived a long time, that it's harder to resist the forward movement of all things than just to go along. God's love is not only intact in the midst of this chaos. God is moving faster than ever before. No one in town can miss the parade. The healer is at our door. Working with nature ... walking with the Lord ... bringing our sick and troubled selves to the front to receive the touch and be given our own power to share it is easier than hanging back. More is ready.

Let us go together into the presence of Almighty God, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.