

Sermon for 22 May 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Scriptures: Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67 (UM791:Response:**Let all the world in every corner sing, My God and King!** *Hymn 93, Tune 10 op.cit.*);

Revelation 21:10-22:5; John 14:23-29

“Departure and outreach”

Continuing our annual study of what we do with good news, we use scriptures written by Paul to one church where he really got along: “The Letter to the Philippians;” we use a song most Jews would know, when they wanted to celebrate (Psalm 67); we read a passage from the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, imagining the future living with Jesus; and we close with more of those last moments Jesus spent with the disciples before he was arrested, when he reassured them this was all in God’s hands and that was very good.

The question I have, after reading these texts, is, “What makes you so sure?”

I can’t even reach my doctor by telephone without all kinds of waiting and mistaken identity; and everywhere I turn I see evidence things are falling apart worse than ever.

Last week I asked you to close your eyes and imagine, remember, a moment when you felt relaxed, and maybe even realized a lot of what you worried about was more mental than actual ... and in both services I got interrupted.

I don’t mean you interrupted my sermon ... but when I asked for your joys and concerns, in both services someone spoke up and we went immediately to Buffalo and the tragedy that had just occurred there.

And life hasn’t been the same since.

Which probably gets us closer to these verses we’re reading today, where people are trying to live up to the good word about Jesus, and even though they work for us for a little moment, something big over the news still stuns us, and some sign of how much trouble we’re in whizzes by, and this project of getting organized for good news gets weak in the knees.

Isazetta said what stunned her was this replacement theory and the spooky effect it seems to carry all over the country ... white people believing ... well, I won’t even go there. Ben said we’ve got to get rid of guns; It’s that simple .. but how?

And you know, by the time we got through with it in the 10:30 service, Carol Mason said we seemed to be having such a good time she was sorry she stayed home on the phone, she wished she’d come here with us.

I've done lots of praying and thinking and talking and listening this week, and I've come up more clear-headed than you might think, so listen: The church is small, yes. We're old and weak and disappointed and This is the good news for most congregations in our moment of history. I'm not talking about the wild-eyed evangelicals who see Trump as their savior. I'm not talking about all the splits over sex or birth control ... those places where the crowds are, at least in lots of states and lots of politics and 'way too many Bible classes. I'm talking about here, in a small group, where we treat one another kindly, put up with each other mostly ... I've made the rounds this week and insisted on that in more than one place, not because I'm better than the rest of you, but because it's my job to bring you to order if I can and confront you if I must, so that this precious, God-given goodwill keeps going, and Black people and white people say what's on their heart to one another, and we talk about serious things In our world right now, and the prayerful energy that rises up out of this little fellowship works its magic, just like it always has. Those first days and years of Christianity were no cleaner or clearer than we are now, even though some of the lines in Scripture sound good. God is using us. God will use us. There's all sorts of work to be done. We each have ideas to put forward ... We've been at this long enough to be real and practical. Dear God, thank you for bringing us alive and keeping us alive, and for showing us love through each other, patience by patience.

It sounds ordinary, but who told you how to judge? What sense does it make to you to say we aren't precious and powerful in God's scheme of things? Who says things are all right if we'll just keep on? We are changing. The fence we just put up around the parking lot is progress. The noise we made last week is precious, a sign we can be real together ... and yes, a sign we have courtesy and calmness we owe each other, just as we've prayed for and contributed and worked and partied with each other longer than we've done many things.

Jesus left ... and Jesus is alive. God wears us thin, and gives us relief and renewal. This church is alive, and love is among us.

In Jesus' name, we are alive and well, needed and beautiful.

Amen.