

Sermon for 30 April 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Scriptures: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23:UM137, *Response 2*); 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

"This one"

Keep in mind that this is no longer a study or devotional retreat, but a praise band, a revival, a brush arbor time out of earshot of the "Massa's" house on the plantation.

And along those lines, did you ever think about how incredible it is that the very people Christians had enslaved and brought over to this foreign land were the ones that turned out converting to Jesus Christ? Incredible, I call it. An historical wonder.

The church assumes that anybody who shows up for Sunday church is serious about religion, and so it divides certain parts of the year into special, intense focusing on, in the case of Lent, the substance of walking with Jesus, and now, during these Great Fifty Days following Easter, into examples of how to celebrate the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday, among other things, we centered on hymns by the great blind hymn-writer Fanny J. Crosby, which our Minister of Music, Leroy, assembled for a service sometime back. They're familiar and beloved enough to raise many hearts .. which is what we're practicing these post-Easter Sundays.

Today, one of our scriptures is the beloved 23rd Psalm, which I've never failed to get people to say by heart @ any funeral I've ever conducted. It's just incredibly encouraging.

But we're after more than familiarity in these weeks before Pentecost. We're simulating the days and months and years that followed Jesus's death as a common criminal because, as best we can put it together, Rome considered him a dangerous threat to their control in the area around what we know as modern-day Israel. After that awful event, came this awesome inspirational interpretation, and this movement we're part of still, that never died out, but instead grew and grew.

We're building on the inspiration his ministry had generated, which wouldn't cease to spread, first among the Jews, and then beyond into the larger population of that troubled and long-suffering region and beyond.

We're tapping into the universal talent for spiritual development that has marked human history, as it applies to our part of it.

Diverse and distant as we are from that moment and those regions, we're still enough like them to learn things for our benefit.

How many of us, for instance, sincerely believe in truths like the Ten Commandments? How many think we're better off with the Golden Rule ?

Of course we can say that, when Sunday was a day off for most people, there were still lots of folks who didn't get off even then, or that when most folks went to church, the church was totally segregated as to race, and women could neither vote nor preach?

Nevertheless, those of us who show up faithfully here on Sundays, and who support. and in individual ways practice, our Christian faith, know we have something to contribute to society, And although we're educated enough to accept the good influence of the other great religions, we demonstrate by our actions that Christianity is wholesome, and greatly needed, in our times.

So I see today's point in giving us ways to practice the faith we've been given, and to memorize and work out how to say hallelujahs along the lines we know by heart.

Getting personal, the Bible has never failed to help me. Although I left the church for quite some time as a grown-up and seminary-trained man, I turned back ... I can understand the text about Moses and the burning bush: Long-gone from home, he said to himself, "I'll turn aside and see this..." and lo and behold, the Lord said, "Gotcha!" and the rest, as we say, is history.

Getting specific, we've got something we need ... and we know other people need it too No matter how tolerant we are of Buddhists and Hindus and Muslims, etc., and no matter how much we agree that God works in mysterious ways through non-religious people to bring about good and heal all kinds of ills, we hear the message. What we know is what works for us.

Everything we can do to pray well is important. The longer we live, the sounder the Golden Rule looks, whether in marriage or politics. This is not a side-line. This is the Gospel truth, and practicing our brand of faith is closer by the day than anything else.

Am I right?

"This one." Follow this one. Give your heart and soul to Jesus Christ. Don't wait. See what kind of training you can get, if you feel ignorant about it. Every week, there are hundreds of examples of Jesus in my life. I can't go to sleep without turning things over to him. I don't wake up without starting over, praying and complaining and giving thanks and worrying and taking deep breaths and moving, sometimes forward, sometimes down, sometimes up ...

Pardon my frankness, but this is what we're supposed to do. We're not here for ourselves. We're ourselves because we've been brought here, step by step and saint by saint, to this Sunday morning in Jesus. This is the way. This is the word. This is the news.

Listen to it!

This one.

Amen.