

Hanging Together
Second Sunday of Easter - Year B - 04/11/2021
Psalm Reading: 133
1st Reading: 1 John 1:1-2:2, 2nd: John 20:19-31

A famous slogan of the American Revolution came from that font of memorable sayings, Benjamin Franklin. He said, “We must all hang together or most assuredly we will all hang separate.”¹ It is a great play on words that depicts a grim reality for that revolutionary generation.

In our reading, the disciples had gathered together in Jerusalem at a place, basically a hiding place. It was secure, well, as secure as they could make it. Verse 19 tells us that the doors were locked, locked not to keep the disciples in, but to keep others out. There were perhaps ten men in the room maybe more, and their number may have been greater, as it probably included women from Jesus’ following. In spite of their strength in numbers, they still feared for their safety.

They had reason to be fearful. The threat of force surrounded them in the city. There was the physical force wielded by both the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, as well as the Sanhedrin. Their master had been taken from them by the authorities. He had been beaten, flogged, and forced to carry a cross out to the hill at Golgotha where he was crucified, died and later carried off to be buried. They knew that the same force could be easily applied to any one, or even all, of them. There were also mobs in the city that might wish to attack them

1 https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/benjamin_franklin_151597

for ideological reasons. It would happen later to Paul, and was the cause of the death of Stephen.

In this cruel city Jesus had been taken from their midst, leaving them shaken, sad, and leaderless. Most people, in such dire circumstances, would have scattered to the four winds, or run down the mountain road to return to Galilee, the place from which most of them had come.

It had only been a few days since the crucifixion. In fact, the Bible tells us that this was on the evening of the first day of the week, (v.19) which would have been that Sunday, the crucifixion of Jesus had only been the Friday before.

The disciples must have realized that, should they split up, they could easily be arrested. There was strength in numbers. But there was something else that held them together as well. It was a common cause, and the memory of the man who had been their master. He had been charismatic. He had worked miracles among the people. He had called them to follow him, for it was through Him that they would find God. He had been the heart and soul of their group. In fact, he still was their heart and soul, even though he had been...Crucified...Died...and Buried.

Yes, there were level heads among them. Though they may have been afraid, the disciples had had the foresight and the faith to stay together during this dangerous time not just for their own safety, but so they could organize, plan, and move forward with their shared goals.

We can imagine them meeting, talking, wondering what to do next. I can just see Peter calling for some bold activity, like taking to the streets and proclaiming Christ's message. I can

imagine others preaching caution, or retreat. Without Jesus, their leader, how would they know what to do? All would be chaos and fear and squabbling among themselves, with reasoning, debate and discussion taking them every direction imaginable. Yet here they were, all together, not necessarily of one mind, but certainly of one body. It was almost as if they were waiting for something...or perhaps someone to give them direction.

It was in the midst of this uncertainty that something amazing happened. Their locked door, their security precautions were not proof against every intruder ... Jesus appeared! (v.19) Their leader was again in their presence! How could it be? This was the beloved one they had seen die on the Cross! Such an encounter certainly would have caused a stir. When Jesus walked in among them, without any regard for the locked door, I can imagine, at first, stunned silence, followed by an outburst of voices expressing surprise and joy. Our reading tells us that "Jesus came and stood among them" then Jesus showed them the wounds in his hands and his sides. (v.20) so they could believe it was really him, and to help them comprehend what he had been through. Those wounds would forever be identified with our Lord.

Throughout this trying time they had been at a loss, but their instincts had been good. They had known enough to stick together, in spite of the terrible things that had happened, in spite of the threat that seemed to surround them.

This, was the important thing. They were united, if not always in opinion or purpose, then at least they were united in body, so that when they did act they would be able to concert

their actions and have an effect that would not only save them but allow them to bring Christ's saving message to all the world.

This story contains an important message for us in our own time of trouble, seemingly shut in by the forces that surround us, often afraid even to go out on to the street. We must understand that together we are better. United we are stronger. And like the disciples, we have a leader who is ever-present and who has risen from the dead, and will appear to us and show us the way. As it was for the disciples, our leader is Jesus Christ. It truly is he who will show us the way.

Jesus spoke to his disciples, and Jesus speaks to us in the same voice. Jesus began by telling them, "Peace be with you!" This is an important beginning. Just like the disciples, we need calm. We need to reduce our anxiety level and look at what faces us clearly. When we are filled with fear, we act precipitously, we respond with the lizard part of our brain, flight or fear guides our actions. We need to absorb the message in a logical manner so that we know how to act upon it. We need to know that God is with us, no matter the situation. We need to know that we are given a mission in this world and that Christ is with us no matter how great the obstacles we see in our path. And we know, as the disciples knew, that we take on this mission for Christ's sake.

But Jesus came to the disciples not just to make an appearance. He had something to tell them. He gave them, not merely a message, but more, a command, and they needed this guidance for they did not know what to do next. And the master said to the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am

sending you.” And so we are sent. So we are told to act in the world in the same manner that Jesus acted. And it is here that we come to see the crucial aspect of this master / disciple relationship that has formed between Jesus and these people over the course of his three year ministry. (v.21)

We can summarize the mission of a disciple in very few words. And this is true for any disciple, in any field. The mission of a disciple is to become like the master: to act like the master, talk like the master, to be the same force in the world as the master. From Christ’s statement we understand that he had been sent to the world by God? And Jesus tells the disciples that they are, indeed, being sent out to do the same thing Christ was sent to do.

And what is that? To bring light and salvation. Christ is depicted as light, right in the beginning of the Gospel of John in verses 4 and 5 of the first chapter, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” We see a parallel with this right in the beginning of the Bible as the first thing God does through the Word, which is Jesus Christ, is create light. This light is the light of understanding.

Understand that it is God who sends Jesus. Jesus sends the disciples. If it is the job of the disciples to be like the master, then it is also the job of the disciples to make more disciples to continue this work in the world. We, my friends, are the disciples they, the Apostles, created. Beginning with God, through Jesus, through those disciples in that locked room, the mandate comes down to us!

So, it is our mission to bring light, through the Word, to the world. And by bringing the Word, we also bring salvation. That is a heavy responsibility. Those first disciples, the Apostles, were anxious to do their part, and they would eventually leave that locked room and venture out into the world. To do their work they could not remain locked up forever. They would spread out to every corner of the planet, bringing God's message, until today it has reached all seven continents.

It may sound bold, but I dare say, that someday we will burst out from this gravity well we call earth to have churches on the moon and Mars and beyond. But, you know, there are still places even in our own community that need the work of disciples. There are so many who do not know the benefits of a relationship with God. So many who do not understand what our relationship is with each other.

Like the disciples, we need to hang together as we face the dangers of this world, but knowing what our mission is, we must burst out and bring God's message to the community. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus tells the Apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all I have commanded you." Let us do, then, as Christ commands.

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