



SECOND SUNDAY EASTER 2006

Acts 4: 32-35 1 John 5: 1-6 John 20:19-31

The Gospel today is a continuation of the First Day narrative. Last Sunday, Easter Day, we celebrated morning and beginnings. Today we move towards evening. Mary Magdalene has proclaimed her faith in the risen Lord. We turn now to the story of the eleven. "Late in the day", we use this as an expression when we describe something that happens almost at the last minute.

It would appear from the narrative that the eleven spent the first Easter day behind locked doors, too frightened, by possible violence, to venture out. In the "morning" story Mary Magdalene goes searching for Jesus. In the "evening" story Jesus goes searching for his disciples.

The two stories were originally independent as can be seen from the inconsistencies, such as Mary's witness having no impact and the beloved disciple now a member of the fearful group.

The appearance story follows a formula. The disciples are bereft; Jesus comes bearing a message of peace; the disciples come to a recognition of the presence of Jesus; Jesus renews the command to go forth in mission.

This pattern is for our instruction. Here is the essence of the Easter message. There is no place for fear or spiritual paralysis. The presence of Christ is a constant and his presence is peace. We must make this message our own. Christianity is a gift for others not an end in itself. As God sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us.

Reflection on and discussion of this lesson is our primary task. Christian living is about change-making. As Christians we are part of a movement which seeks to liberate, to heal and to make whole. We are not about numbers, filling churches with people. If we are not prepared to be disciples there is not much point in being Christian. If we seek to convert people, or bring back the lapsed, we should ask ourselves, "What for?" So that they can take the liberating, healing, love of God to others.

The "how" of our discipleship will differ according to our circumstances, our era, our talents. We need the community to help us discern our gifts, and to support us when we feel dispirited.

The picture of the ideal community is drawn in Acts. Christians are people of one heart and one mind. This spills over into a concern for one another which extends even to material things. People of one heart, and one table, cannot feel alone or neglected. This unity is expressed in terms of power-for-ministry.

A local church attends to the needs of its members as well as providing outreach to the wider community.

The meditation provided in 1 John should help us with this. Belief in Jesus as Christ is a statement of belief in the God of Jesus. Love of the parent implies love of the siblings. Certainty in belief comes not from dogma but from response to what God asks of us. Jesus comes through water and blood.

The Spirit who testifies at Jesus' baptism also testifies at his death. Both water and blood are signs of life. Both are part of the birthing process. Our way to Christian life is also by way of water and blood. The water of Baptism is necessary to show our new life as disciples liberated from old patterns of living, and the blood of fidelity to dying and rising is also necessary if we are to be a living sign of Christ in our world.

Faith in the Risen Jesus is the power to overcome all obstacles to our mission. This reassurance comes from the Spirit of Truth.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.