



Pastor Ken's Sermon

SERMON – 2ND EASTER

ACTS 4:32-35

APRIL 11, 2021

“ALL TOGETHER NOW ... 1,2,3”

In his novel *“David Copperfield”*, Charles Dickens describes an evening in which Davy settles into *“a little bed which there was just enough room to get into.”* As he does, he listens as the wind howls, knowing chill and fog gathered about, and yet his retreat was the most delicious and secure a man could imagine. Is that a description of the church that you might favor and savor? God is our refuge and strength – so says Psalm 46. Is the church our place to retreat from the world amid our recognizable liturgy and comforting confessions?

There is a story about American naturalist John Muir in which Mr. Muir sits comfortably one evening in the cabin of a friend. He is attracted to the sound of the wind blowing forcefully in the Sierra Mountains of California. He puts on his coat, climbs a tree, and perched on a limb, faces the wind – accompanied by and driving a heavy snow. When asked about it the next day, Muir said nature was something to be felt not just observed. Is that a picture of the church you might favor? Do we exist to get out in the elements, even endure them, leaving our comfort and security behind?

The church may have been created on Easter, when our Lord appeared to frightened followers in an upper room, declared his peace to them, and said *“as the Father has sent me so I send you.”* Some say that occurred on Pentecost. Regardless, we get a fascinating glimpse of the church in our lesson today. It's doubtful anything other than the resurrection of Christ and the infilling of the Holy Spirit could have shaped the wills of people to care for one another as these early Christians did. The church is, despite its obvious flaws, the provisional expression of the Kingdom Jesus spoke of when he began his ministry. We speak of things like *“church and state.”* But really the question is church and world, Kingdom and people of God and how we relate to the world and its values.

Many people, particularly in our culture, are what today we'd call individualists – who consider his or her goals primary and those of any group to which they belong secondary. Individualists own up to individual mistakes, but are suspicious, even resentful of correction and oversight from the group. They'll handle that themselves. Individualists have a conception of the church much like John Muir did of nature – they want to experience it on their own terms. Yet curiously they may also think of the church as David Copperfield did his bed...a cozy place just for them – a *“just Jesus and me”* place!

Christianity, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the resurrection opposes individualism like this. We're told in our lesson *“all the believers were of one heart and mind. NO one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.”* The dependency and self-sacrifice of the community described in our lesson is remarkable, but it was not an imposed sacrifice, it was a result of the resurrection – a willing sacrifice and participation in something *“they all shared in common.”*

Conversely, some people are what today we'd call *“collectivists”* – who think the group and it's well-being is more important than the individual. Christians, *“individually members of one another”*

collectivists may say, must regard *“the well-being of others over mine.”* The individual exists in their minds, ONLY for the sake of the group. They may believe only such thinking meets the definition of church the ancient Greeks called *“koinonia”* – common life, arising from one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

The Apostle Paul, writing many years later, would describe what is on display in our lesson by saying, in Galatians 2:20 *“I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* But note that Paul speaks of two bodies in this passage...his and the body of Christ, the church. Paul was neither individualist nor collectivist – but he did regard mutual dependence, accountability and care as what made the church unique, it’s witness persuasive, and if neglected, the church, the *“New Israel”* would fare no better than the Old Israel of the Old Testament.

Christianity is not collectivism. If too much individualism sprouts pride, too much collectivism breeds envy. We are not individuals who contract for the sake of convenience with other individuals nor are we a great big indistinguishable blob of togetherness. We are the church. Disciples of Jesus who individually gather to disciple and be disciplined by others. Mutually dependent, mutually responsible, together more than we can be individually. The church is not David Copperfield’s cozy bed – a warm sanctuary against the world’s chill winds – *“just right for me”* but neither do we *“John Muirishly”* brave the elements on our own. Because we can’t.

The church of Acts was small but growing. Today, at least in our culture, the church is large but shrinking. Our congregation over the last year completed quite a nice *“refresh”* of our facilities – adding a new *“20-year roof”* just this past week. But if we do not learn the lesson of Acts and dedicate ourselves, individually members of one another, accountable to one another, dependent on one another to disciple, serve and evangelize, we may not need that roof for that long. Acts reports how the church of the 1st century grew from a tiny sect and Acts shows how the church of the 21st century can avoid becoming one again.

The church, to repeat the Greek phrase – was created to be *“koinonia”*, a community – but we are not David Copperfield’s bed – a cozy sanctuary that keeps comfort in and world out. Stepping out into the world is our mandate from Christ, risks, costs and all, described by another Greek word *“diakonia”* – which means *“servanthood”*. We don’t go out like John Muir serving the world on our own terms. We are church – a people of *“one heart and mind”* – having all things in common, we serve in the name of Jesus for the sake of Jesus in the manner of Jesus for one another, and for the sake of the world. Much grace will be upon us as we do. AMEN