



The Westminster Pulpit

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“What do you need?” **Sermon on Acts 2:42-47**

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Fourth Sunday of Easter

On Easter Sunday, we heard the story about how she thought he was the gardener, and then there was something in the way he said her name, “Mary!” And suddenly it was Easter, “I have seen the Lord!”

The next Sunday, we heard about Thomas, who said he wasn’t going to believe anything about the resurrection until he put his finger in the marks of his hands and his hand in his side. When he received the opportunity... “My Lord and my God!” Suddenly, Easter.

Last Sunday, two people, walking towards nowhere, were met by a stranger. They invited him into their home, and in the breaking of the bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Suddenly, Easter.

The last three Sundays are all familiar Easter passages, but what we’re about to read from Acts, Chapter 2, isn’t Easter- it’s Pentecost. We’re not supposed to read Acts, Chapter 2 until 50 days after the resurrection. Acts, Chapter 2 is when all the people were gathered in one place, and the Spirit came down, and the wind and the fire, and speaking of tongues. Peter interpreted for the crowd what was happening, and everyone was cut to the heart! Repent and be baptized! And boom, three thousand people were added to the roles. Pentecost!

Why a Pentecost text for the fourth Sunday of Easter? We’re supposed to be talking about those people who have seen the risen Lord. Unless the lectionary is saying that, while a handful of history-making people like Mary and the disciples who got to see the risen Lord face to face, since the time of Pentecost, the encounter with the risen Lord has been found in a Word made flesh. In the Body of Christ.

In other words, Easter has dawned on me because I have seen the risen Lord in you.

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone

because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

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Salvation comes in many forms.

“What do you need?” “I need you to pick me up!” Salvation. “What do you need?” “I need you to forgive me.” Salvation. “What do you need?” “Do you know how to cut the water off?” “What do you need?” “I don’t know where to turn.” “What do you need?” “I need you to just listen.”

Salvation is an eternal thing. We’ll talk about it for years. “You were an answer to prayer.”

Salvation is discovering that you have a life.

It’s been an interesting week for me. It started out with a staff retreat up at Cullen Douglass’ tree houses. He has these beautiful tree houses up on the plateau with this scenic view. You should go up there. Tell him I sent you. I’m working on getting a free night’s stay. But the staff was gathered together in one place, and our icebreaker was to share our call stories.

I’m still formulating my call story. I went to seminary, not sure why I was going to seminary. I couldn’t see my future in the Church, mostly because, as a pastor’s kid, my past was in the church. But I was married. I needed some employment, and the call process with the Presbytery kept marching me toward ordination.

And sure enough, I remember kneeling on the slate floor of First Presbyterian Church in Morganton, NC. A strange new place. My father had his hands on me, and I felt the weight of the hands of strangers. I was ordained.

I can remember, for months, seeing people come Sunday after Sunday and wondering, why on earth were they coming to sit on hard pews? You would think a pastor would have that question answered.

Here’s how the question is getting answered.

Because it’s been an interesting week for me. A few days ago, I sat across a table from a woman who was planning her ex-husband’s funeral service. Usually, when a woman is planning her ex-husband’s funeral service, it is called premeditated murder. This occurrence is called love.

Her ex-husband was an alcoholic and died an alcoholic. She lived for some 46 years with an alcoholic until she had to get out. It was like trying to save a drowning man. He was going to drown her, too. Salvation looks like getting your life back.

Salvation looks like celebrating the life of a man who died from his addiction.

She told me he was a traveling salesman selling lines of jewelry to jewelry stores all over the south. He was more than that; he was a conveyor of information. He could say to a store owner, "Hey, have you tried this? I saw it at a store down in Tuscaloosa." Salvation comes like a net... a network of people who are just trying to make a living. "Maybe you could try...."

He was more than a network, he was a friend. The store owner would say, "Hey, there's nowhere for you to stay, and the hour is getting late, stay with us. We have an extra bed." Inviting the stranger.

A friend is someone who says, "If you ever need someone to help you with that.... If you ever need someone to get you there.... If you ever need an ear to hear and a heart to hold your worry. If you ever need... He was a friend.

She said, "I was surprised when all these people sent notes from all over the south saying how they were touched by his life." No one ever says, "When I grow up, I want to be an alcoholic." And sitting there across the table was love, the love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. She wanted this man's life to be celebrated.

And there, across the table, I have seen the Lord! Is it what I need? What do you need?

It's been an interesting week for me. I received word that Cardy Davis was not long for this world. Cardy, that tall and distinguished man who sat midway on the aisle. I remember visiting him years ago after he had a leg injury and was stuck in rehab. I expected him to be a bit miserable because that's what I would be. You can ask my wife.

Cardy was a mover and a shaker of a man, whose injury forced him to sit in a room. When I entered the room, he smiled broadly, and welcomed me in. He told me how great the care he received from the church had been. And when I left, I was healed, my life was better.

This week, when I visited him, he didn't welcome me in. He was not long for the world. I leaned over his bed and said his name, and then I said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul." He breathed in, he needed that Word. And right there, I think we both saw the Lord.

It's been an interesting week.

On Thursday night, I moved that candle from over there, to here in the chancel. A light of God, the flame of the Spirit, and we listened to the new elders as they shared their stories. And if you ask for the Spirit, It will show up. It was story after story, Pentecost.

And one shared how he grew up in the church, and then left the church because he didn't need the Lord. He outthought the need for a Lord. And then one day on a road heading for nowhere in particular, dressed in a suit, he had a flat tire. He said, "I know how to change a tire, but when I opened my trunk, I remember that I took the jack out to prop up a sink for a project at home."

About that time, a beat-up pool service van pulled up with some strangers who said, "Sir, you're too nicely dressed.' And they changed my tire."

"Listen," he said, "If the roles were reversed and they were stuck, I wouldn't have stopped. I would have kept going." He said, "I tried to offer them money, but money was no good. It's not what they needed." They needed to share something of the gospel. And that little road to nowhere turns a young man around and it changes the world. He'll have an impact that changes the world. It's eternal. "And I have seen the Lord." The night in the chancel was like Pentecost, like Easter. I bumped into one of the elders who had been there, and he said, "Last night was just what I needed." What do we need? We need people who will share the story of Christ's love. Salvation comes as easily as changing a flat tire or saying, "I love you," or "You're mine."

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had a need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

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