

Sunday, May 1, 2016

Acts 16: 9-15

John 14:23-29

Go, Teach and Tell Jesus' Story

{Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Jesus is alive and is worthy of all our praise, joy time and life! And because Jesus is alive we have a church in which we may gather to grow in relationship with the Risen Christ and with each other. Throughout this season of Easter we will focus on the 5 purposes of the church and our focus today is "Go, Teach and Tell Jesus' Story".}

It was 1933 when Walt Disney Studios released the animated short film featuring Fiddler Pig and Fifer Pig two musicians who arrogantly believed that their quickly made houses of straw and twigs would protect them from the Big Bad Wolf. "Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" became a hit song that year and is one of the most recognized and popular Disney hits of all time. The pigs believed that their homes were safe from the powerful deep breaths of the hungry Wolf who threatened their lives. Fiddler and Fifer Pig liked to dance and sing more than prepare their houses for the hot wind from a wolf. But the third little pig knew differently and prepared his house by using bricks and mortar. And when the breath of the wolf came near him—the breath kept on moving like a little breeze. Why did this song become such a hit? Because being afraid was named as something that everyone could relate.

What are you afraid of? For some it is technology, others it is spiders or bugs, others still might be environmental issues, disasters, and still others it is sickness, aging and personal economic concerns. Yet why are we afraid when most of these- we have no reason to be because we cannot combat these focus of these fears as they are much bigger than us over all.

The disciples were afraid of what was to happen soon because Jesus had spoken to them about his leaving them through his pending death. Jesus knew he had to die in order to fulfill the prophecy that the Son of God would save God's faithful people. But what about those people who were the closest to Jesus? They were afraid. In our reading from John 14 the question was asked, "Why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

He responded by saying, “Don’t be afraid. If you love me obey my teaching and God will love you and come to you and be with you always.” Don’t be afraid. The Counselor, the Holy Spirit will come in my name and the Spirit will teach you and remind you about everything I have said as well. But they are not convinced because they need to be reminded again of Jesus’ teachings and to know that they will not be alone.

How difficult it is for us to realize that we are not alone and that we can live with peace here and now.. But what is this peace that Jesus is talking about? It is an inward calmness much like Magellan’s first glimpse of the big wide ocean.

In 1520 world explorer Ferdinand Magellan battled for an entire year to find a passage around South America. There at the very tip of the continent, in its icy waters he encountered some of the worst weather anywhere on earth. Raging seas, towering ice floes, and a mutinous crew combatted his efforts. Finally he made his way through those straits and entered into a great body of water that lay beyond, and as he and his crew lifted their faces to heaven and gave thanks to God, he named the new ocean "The Peaceful One -- the Pacific Ocean." The Straits of Magellan were horrendous yet when they came through that region and saw the ocean—it was calm and quiet—much like the inner peace they experienced as they prayed in thanksgiving to God.

Have you ever found yourself seeking this kind of peace—maybe it is because you are afraid of what is to come—or maybe it is because we need to be reminded of what our church teaches about Christ Jesus and his peace. In his words Jesus wants to lead us in the same way to our place of peace with him. He says, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Each week we take time to greet each other with hugs and handshakes—saying, “May the peace of Christ be with you.” Just what does this mean?

As Jesus was preparing his disciples for his leaving he offered his peace as an act of love for those who believed in him and followed him. The peace we express to one another is only made possible because of Jesus. And this is an act of faith on our part for we believe God has called us and empowered us to share Christ’s peace with others- that is to acknowledge each other through eye contact, a gentle handshake, an embrace or even a simple gesture of gratitude that the other person is also a faithful child of God.

There is a story about an orphan bear cub born who was alone in the woods and subject to many predators. One day the orphan cub came close to a giant male black bear. The larger bear peered around and soon realized that the cub was all alone. He gave the little cub a friendly nudge and in this nudge the adoption was complete. Papa bear proceeded to show the cub how to grub for insects and how to catch fish and how to scratch his back against a tree.

One day the two bears became separated and the cub began to cry and looked frantically for his new father, but couldn't find him anywhere. The cub approached a stream where he'd learned to fish and something caught his attention. He looked up to see a mountain lion ready to pounce. The cub mimicked the posture of his adopted father as he stood on his hind legs and bared his teeth. Then, the cub let loose a mighty growl that should have reverberated throughout the forest. But, only a tiny bear cub squeak came out. Yet even a surprise to the little cub, the mountain lion lowered his head and ran off in the opposite direction.

How proud the little cub was standing tall on his hind legs having made a mountain lion run away! Yet he didn't see but just a few yards behind him, at full, ferocious height, his sharp, white teeth bared in a snarl, stood Daddy bear. He may not have made a sound, but he was there standing guard, protecting his young. The little cub had power available greater than anything he could produce on his own. There was a greater power watching over him.

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid. Those who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

The Girl Guides of Canada enable girls to be confident, resourceful and courageous and to make a difference in the world. To be courageous means not being afraid to go, tell and teach others about your beliefs in God. It also means knowing that you are not alone and you have nothing to fear no matter how the world changes in the years to come. If you believe in Jesus you have nothing to fear.

Many years after Christ ascended into heaven and Paul was reaching out to many and telling the stories of Jesus, he went to Macedonia. On the Sabbath, he looked for a place of prayer by the river but instead he found a group of women

who had gathered there. He began to tell them stories of Jesus and they listened earnestly. Lydia already was a worshiper of God and an independent businesswoman who did much trade with rich folks. Yet as she listened to Paul's message about Jesus her heart was opened. Soon after hearing Paul tell her about Jesus and the need for repentance she and her household were baptized. Paul and his crew were invited to stay with her and her family, but only through a conditional invitation. "If only they considered her a believer in the Lord." She persuaded them and they stayed.

Paul and his group of followers had approached the group of women in peace, they talked to them all about Jesus and in the time shared hearts were opened, and the peace that Paul brought to the group of people that day is the same peace that Jesus gave his disciples, and through faith, he had also passed this on to Saul/ Paul at the time of his conversion. Yet here, Lydia offers a conditional place to stay if they really regard her as a believer. Lydia listened carefully to Paul tell Jesus' story and she probably was afraid of this traveling group of men, but she believed and wanted them to accept her as a true believer as well. She was afraid of what was to come next—like the first disciples, too!

And often, so are we. The disciples had been afraid yet they were commissioned to tell Jesus' story where people had opened their homes. They taught and healed people in the places where Jesus had taught and healed and they were also told to go and tell and teach what Jesus taught about love, and sharing and fairness and being righteous before God. They taught and called people to believe so that they had nothing to be afraid of. Even though the disciples had once been afraid, it was Christ's peace which had opened their hearts and enabled them to go, teach and tell His story.

We are the church of Jesus Christ and we share in the love that Christ offers to us and we also experience his peace. But we must be willing to do so. As a church our purpose is to go and tell others about Jesus; we are to teach others the stories we hold on to as endearing and good. And we are to love others as he taught. Let us remember this as we strive pray and sing and rejoice in Jesus our Saviour. Amen.