

“Be Energetic in Your Life of Salvation”

Philippians 2: 1-13

If I had been a smarter preacher, I would have picked a different text to preach on today. Not that this text is bad or hard to understand by any means. It is just that we just celebrated Regional Assembly and if I was a smarter preacher, I would have picked the assembly’s Scripture to share today. Okay, well, let’s be honest, if I was really a smarter preacher, I would have asked Phil and Sharon Burchell and Shirley Eckels to talk about Regional Assembly today since they were our congregation’s delegates to that event and I would have been off the hook in preaching this morning.

But I didn’t. I picked this text in Philippians for some reason months ago and amazingly enough it ties right into our Regional Assembly experience. The theme for Regional Assembly was “The Rest is still unwritten” and the Scripture focus was the last verse of the Gospel of John where John is saying that if all the things that Jesus had done had been written down, the world would not be able to contain all the books. And the tie in between the Assembly’s theme and the Scripture, was our discussion about where the Church is going and what the future of the Church will look like. We even had Diana Butler Bass, a renowned Church Scholar as our

keynoter as we tried to tackle this topic. And I think it is fair to say, that even she wasn't quite sure what the Church would look like in 10 years, 20 years, even 50 years from now.

But I will tell you, that as I sat in worship, as I listened to her speak and preach, as I talked with fellow Disciples of Christ this past week, I have hope for the future. And I think it all goes back to our passage for today.

As I sat amid the discussion of what the Church is going to look like in the future, I couldn't help but think that, at its core, even in the future, the Church will be the same. It will still be calling people to grow in their relationship with God and it will still be a place where God is experienced and shared. That will not change.

Because the Church of the future as well as the Church of the now is going to look and needs to look a lot like what Paul is describing right here in our text today. Because at its core, the thing that will not change is how we respond to God's grace and God's love.

Let me explain: On Thursday night, as part of worship for Regional Assembly, we had communion. Once again, no brainer. Usually when Disciples get together, there is always communion. And this time was no different. We had communion on Thursday night and we took it by intinction.

Now, the practice of intinction is nothing new to me. On occasion, we take communion by intinction right here in this church. But it wasn't the act of communion that caught my attention. It was a deacon at the back of the church who did.

As we may know, when we take communion by intinction, there are not usually deacons. It is usually just someone holding bread and the cup. The people are invited to come forward, take the bread, dip it in the cup and return to their seats. Deacons are not usually needed when communion is done by intinction.

So I couldn't help but ask myself, why this deacon was standing at the back of the church? Why was he scanning the crowd? Why was this deacon so intense, so intent in his manner in his way of being while we were all going up front for communion? I mean, come on, it's communion by intinction. It is not that hard. Surely, he didn't think we were going to mess it up. It is just ripping off bread and dipping it in the cup.

Now here is confession time. I know that communion time is a time of meditation and yes, I know I should have been focusing on my own business, enjoying the quiet center with God. But I had just driven three hours with two kids, who wanted to watch Frozen again and again. My mind was a little fried. So yes, I let my mind wander a bit. I fully admit I was not in the moment. Instead, I was

watching the deacon at the back of the church rather than focusing on communion time.

Okay, back to my story. This deacon at the back of the church just kept watching the crowd and I just kept watching him. And then suddenly, it all came together. His role was to take communion to the people who could not come forward.

This seems like such a minute detail and probably majority of people in that room took for granted he was back there but as I watched him serve the people, I realized that there was something about his face, his presence as he shared the bread, as he shared the cup. It was almost reverent and you could see, a sense of pride in his actions. Not a haughty, I'm better than you sort of pride but a pride that he was part of something bigger than himself, a pride that realized he was a servant of God, sharing in and sharing with others the most sacred and significant act of faith, a pride that said his very way of being came out of his knowing that he was a Beloved child of God.

And as I watched this deacon serve the people, as I watched him move around the sanctuary, I was envious of him. He had such passion. He had such excitement that it almost seemed to come off of him in waves. He was so energetic and positive in his way of serving that I thought to myself, "Do I have such passion

for serving my God? Do I really get what it means to be a servant of God? Am I really energetic in my faith and the way I live out my faith that it seems to radiate off of me like waves?

Do I have such excitement to know that an act of grace and love can be and is so transforming and life-giving that I just can't wait to pass it around and share it with others?

Passion, excitement and energy, all coming from the fact that this man understood what it was like to experience the grace and love of God and he didn't want anyone to miss out in the experience.

As I watched this man and reflected on this text from Philippians, I realized that is exactly what Paul is talking about when it comes to living out our faith.

Be energetic. Be passionate. Be excited. We know that God has touched our lives and has transformed us. We need to be energetic in the sharing of God's grace and love. We need to be passionate in the way we live out our faith, as the Church of the now and as the Church of the future. That is not going to change.

Because when we really think about it, when we think about the way God has transformed our lives, it is pretty amazing. The God who put the stars in the heavens knows our comings and goings. The God who brought this world into being with just one word offers us words of grace and love. The God who named

the planets and all the angels has named us and claimed us as God's own Beloved Child.

We bear the name of God. We are followers of Jesus Christ. We are his Body here on earth. That is pretty powerful and humbling all at the same time.

The God who brought this world into being knew us before we were even born. Wow! If that doesn't excite us or energize our faith, I don't know what will.

Think about it! It is pretty amazing and should bring us to our knees in wonderment.

The very thought of this should shape how we live out our faith now, should shape how we live out our faith in the future. The wonderment of it all should shape how we come together as a Body of Christ and share God's grace and love. The same God who was, is and forever will be is always there leading us and guiding us along the way. That same God has called us to be partners in God's service. That same God has invited us to share in this life-transforming work.

That should blow our minds. Our God wants to be in relationship with us, not because we owe God anything but because our God loves us more than we could ever imagine. Because our God who does such amazing huge things in the universe takes notice of little ol' us.

Wow! Wow! That is amazing!

Now, here is a side note. In the NRSV and in other translations, in verse 12, it says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”. This is one of my pet peeves. It wish the translators would have asked my opinion on things before they decided to put it in permanent ink for thousands of years. But they didn’t so I’m just going to try to clear up a few things for them, since they are not here any longer.

Okay, When the translators were trying to translate from Hebrew to Greek, Aramaic to Greek, they tried to capture the essence of a word, especially if they couldn’t find a word that translated exactly. They went for the concept instead of the correct definition. PS-Same thing still happens to today. There are words in other languages that just don’t translate easily into English and so translators do the best that they can.

Which brings us back to our text today. The word “fear” doesn’t really mean fear like we think of today. The translators tried to get the overall concept but in my humble opinion, they missed the mark.

Usually when we see the word fear in the Bible, it is in regard to standing in the presence of God. Lots of times in the Psalms, we will hear I stand in fear of God or Fear the Lord with all your heart or as in today, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You get the idea.

But that's not what the original language meant. It was more in line with the word "awe" or "wonderment"; not fear. Yes, sometimes when we are in awe of something there is fear and trembling but usually it is that we are overwhelmed because it is so powerful and mighty.

So really in the Bible, instead of getting we stand in fear of our God, it should read more like we stand in awe of our God. And let's face it, that is more in line with our experience of God any way.

God is not some big bad presence waiting to punish us because we get out line. God is not waiting to strike fear in our hearts every time we encounter God.

God wants to be in relationship with us and God certainly doesn't want the foundation of that relationship to be fear but rather grace and love.

Okay, off my soap box and back to the text. What Paul is really saying in our text today is that when we experience God, we stand in awe. In those moments, we are humbled and overwhelmed which is all good things because it really is mind-blowing to think that the God who created this world had claimed and named us as God's very own.

That's not fear. That's joy. That's excitement. That's energy!

Paul is calling us to be excited, to be energetic, to be passionate in all that we do as people of God, not because we stand in fear but because we are

overwhelmed to think about the possibilities. The God who created this world, the God who brought forth life, is at work in us and through us, enabling us, calling us, empowering us to work to help bring about God's Kingdom here on earth.

That should shake us to our core, not in fear but in joy!

That really is amazing! And no matter what the Church looks like in the future, this will never change.

Because the same God who was in the beginning, the same God who brought forth life, the same God who forever will be is the same God who changed our lives with just a few words: You are my Beloved in who I am well pleased.

We will forever be claimed and named as God's very own.

May we always remember that there is power, energy, and passion in such a name. Amen.