

April 30, 2023 Fourth Sunday of Easter

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

Acts 2:42-47

"Like Fish in Water"

Douglas T, King

A friend and former colleague, Erin Keys, shared this with me. In 2005 the writer, David Foster Wallace, of "Infinite Jest" fame, delivered a commencement address at Kenyon college.. he begins with the following, "There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, 'Morning boys, how's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, 'What the hell is water?'

Wallace then goes on to talk about how each of us is so trapped in our "skull-sized kingdoms" that we are consistently missing the bigger picture. We see the entire world only in terms of how it relates specifically to us and we miss the larger context.

He writes this inner monologue of a cranky commuter making their way home, "I've worked really hard all day and I'm starved and tired and I can't even get home to eat and unwind because of all of these stupid g-d people in my way." Yes, how dare those other people commuting home get in the way of my commute home.

We do live under the assumption that the world revolves around us, don't we?

Wallace goes on to say, "In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There

is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what we worship. If you worship money and things...then you will never have enough...Worship your own body and beauty and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. Worship power—you will feel weak and afraid...Worship your intellect...you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out..."

What we get in our text from the book of Acts this morning is a brief image of a community of believers who have chosen to live beyond their "skull-sized kingdoms." In the aftermath of all of the hooplah of the first Pentecost, the church gets down to the business of being the church. And in this snapshot we are given they are living as the Body of Christ. They are living not in their "skull-sized kingdoms" but in the kingdom of God. They are devoted to the teaching of the gospel, to fellowship with one another, to the sharing of bread, the sharing of all they had with each other, and to prayer.

In this moment the movement of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of Peter are given flesh and bone and lived out by the community. You might call this the golden age of the church. Fred Craddock called it "a picture of the church on its best behavior." Of course, by chapter five in the book of Acts, things take a turn away from God's kingdom and toward the "skull-sized kingdoms." People are lying and being selfish. There are complaints about how the church is functioning and who is getting special attention.

The book of Acts is wonderful in this way. It presents the full scope of what it looks like to be the church. Sometimes we gather and are faithful and remarkable together. Sometimes we

gather and are the reflection of the love of Jesus Christ we have been called to be. Sometimes, we are more than the sum of our parts. We come together and we live out being the body of Christ.

And sometimes we gather and all we do is bring together our human foibles and frailties. Sometimes we gather and are nothing more than a collection of mixed motivations and selfish agendas. Sometimes we are less than the sum of our parts. We come together and we do not live into being the body of Christ.

In both of these cases, and in everything in between, we are the church. A very imperfect human institution striving to follow the lead of God's perfect Holy Spirit in our midst.

Today is the fourth Sunday in the season of Easter. The liturgical time when we pay particular attention to Christ's resurrection which is continually unfolding before us. Jesus rising from the grave is just the start of resurrection power at play in the world. The power of the resurrection has a ripple effect into every corner of creation and throughout all of time.

In this snapshot of the church "on its best behavior" we see the resurrection demonstrating itself in a community living as God has called us to live. The kicker, is that, later in Acts when we see the church on its worst behavior, the resurrection is at work as well. The church has survived generation after countless generation of our failings, sin, and shortcomings. Not only can resurrection power defeat the forces of death, it can overcome all of our stumbling and bumbling as well.

In the darkest days of the pandemic there was much hand-wringing about the survival of the church. Would this latest round of challenges be a fatal blow to the church of

Jesus Christ? Now, no one is more neurotic or a bigger worrier than I am, but I never worry about the future of the church. Yes, the church is not the same as what it was prior to the pandemic. And yes, there will be individual congregations who will end up closing up their buildings due to the financial strains of this particular time. Yes, the church will never look exactly the same as it did five years ago, or twenty-five years ago, or fifty years ago. The church is always changing and has always been changing for thousands of years.

But the church will never die. Jesus' resurrection has assured that. Those disciples hid themselves away after Jesus was crucified, and the church did not die. Members of that earliest iteration of the church lied and stole, and the church did not die. Over the centuries the church has suffered schisms and corruption, incompetence and oppression, and even the lives of the very imperfect lot of us gathered here this morning. And the church abides. The church abides not because of anything you and I do or do not do, but because God's resurrection in Jesus Christ will not be defeated. The body of Christ will rise anew in each and every generation because God's grace is more powerful than any force in history or in human nature.

The church is a home for the resurrection so the church will never die. I do not limit where the resurrection is at work, so I am not saying the church is the only place the resurrection finds a home. But I know this is the best place for us to find ourselves in the midst of the resurrection. This is the best place for us to be led beyond our "skull-sized kingdoms" and into God's kingdom. This is the best place for us to live together, drawn together in God's grace. This is the best place to not solely seek to live out the church in its best form, but to live our own lives in their best forms. This is the

best place for us to grow into the people we were created to be; seekers of the gospel; committed to being in relationship with one another; generously sharing of ourselves and all we have with one another; and expressing our gratitude to God in prayer.

In scripture this morning we heard of the church at its best. We could have just as easily read of the church at its worst. In every form the church is a home to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the place for us to be. At our best, this is where we need to gather. At our worst, this is where we need to gather. Because this is where God's grace created in the resurrection finds a home.

Do you remember that story at the beginning of the sermon about those fish who did not realize they were swimming in water? We are those fish. And the water we are swimming in is the grace of God, demonstrated in the baptisms of Sloane and Jordan this morning. This is the place where that grace is revealed, this is the home of the resurrection. This is the bigger picture. This is the larger context. And we will do our best to teach those little ones this truth in the years to come.

But in the end it is not up to us. It is up to the one who bathes us in grace every day. Sloane and Jordan, come on in, the water is just fine.

Thanks be to God. Amen.