

April 29, 2018
5th Sunday of Easter

Sermons

from The Church of the Covenant

“Building A Movement”

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Acts 2:28-47 & Acts 13:1-3

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler,^[a] and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Building A Movement

This week, This week, Each night, all over the ocean, swarms of shrimp wiggle and kick their way from deep below the waves to feed at the surface. Each creature is tiny less than a centimeter long, and sometimes much smaller and there are trillions of them.

New research suggests this nightly migration of tiny ocean creatures might be helping to change the ocean on a grand scale, sending columns of water down as the animals swim up. It's a radical idea. Scientists have long assumed that wind and waves, not animals, are the drivers of ocean-mixing.

In a recent interview, John Dabiri, an engineering professor at Stanford University, said, "People assumed that they were just too small to make a difference." It's difficult to imagine how swimming animals less than a centimeter long could stir up water over meters or even kilometers. Unless they're swimming in huge groups."Imagine a ball of these microscopic animals swimming toward the light," Dabiri says. "As they start swimming upward, each of them kicks a little bit of water backward." The next shrimp kick the same parcel of water a little more. And the next shrimp and the next shrimp and "pretty soon you have this vertical stampede upward of these shrimp. The water is getting rushed downward by this consecutive series of kicks." The result is that, even though each animal is tiny, the group generates a powerful jet that transforms the water in which they are swimming.

For the past few weeks, we have been hearing and wrestling with some of the stories of what it meant to be part of this early movement of Christ-followers, working together and building a critical mass of individuals affecting change in their location. Acts is a story of people willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. People willing to risk their lives to do their one little action to make their whole community flourish. This morning we have a bit of a split vision. The first part of the reading from Acts was looking back at the formation of this new community, at the early adopters of this budding movement who are realizing that their old way of life, the status quo that crucified Jesus, no longer promotes life-giving possibilities. It is a story about people asking who are we and who do we want to be and then doing their part to affect change on a micro-level that has huge results.

The second passage we heard from Acts is a story about the first people who are being sent out into the world to proclaim the Gospel and to reveal to a new set of people a radical new paradigm that elevates and expands life.

At the entrance of God's church is the revolving door. Invented in 1888 one of the main advantages of the revolving door is that they allow more people to enter and exit buildings. Using a revolving door, people can enter and exit a building at the same time. Regular doors force one person to wait while the other passes through.

These two moments in today's scripture show us a glimpse of who we are called to be as a church in this present moment. A community that offers hope and belonging to all those who walk through our doors. As well as people willing to do their part and go out into the world to share the Good News, with all those we may encounter. These stories remind us that when we send people out into the world, they are not alone. Each one of us is working together to create God new paradigm of spiritually alive, radically inclusive, and Justice centered world community.

The London Economist Umar Hague proposes that the Economic paradigm that we are currently living in is limiting the potential for the flourishing of life. He argues that we need to radically rethink and change the paradigm to one that elevates and expands life. All life yours, mine, the planets

Hague argues that "Human organizations have become treadmills. But they should be gardens in which lives flourish, grow, fruit, and flower. The great challenge of this age isn't single-mindedly maximizing one-dimensional income as the sole end and purpose of human existence, but elevating and expanding life's possibility, whether mine, yours, our grandkids' or our planet's. That noble, beautiful, improbable quest for self-realization eudaimonia is the reason we're all here, everyone." Eudaimonia is an Ancient Greek term that means flourishing and fulfillment.

In our scripture today, Peter is asking the early converts to take the risk and hop off the treadmill of their old way of being and plant a new garden. Building a new movement that confronts and questions the status quo, speaks truth to power, and provides an alternative vision takes courage and resilience. It also takes a vast network of people, each doing a small part, to achieve great things.

In May of 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers reach the peak of Mount Everest. They were the first ever to reach its 29,029-foot peak, and met instant fame upon their return: today their ascent is considered a great achievement of the 20th century.

In 1974, Hillary, a New Zealander, detailed the perilous climb and his motivations for tackling it on “Interview with Sir Edmund Hillary: Mountain Climbing,” by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. The conversation touches topics from Hillary’s preparation for the perilous climb, the thrill of reaching the top and even the abominable snowman (Hillary thought he might have found its tracks while scaling Everest, but later discounted Yeti reports as unreliable)

One of the most important things that Hillary said in this interview is that “On this expedition, we had 13 western members of the expedition altogether. Then we had, I think, about 30 permanent high-altitude Sherpas these are men who will be carrying loads to high altitudes for us, and who are all hard, efficient performers. So then, altogether some 600 loads were carried into the Mt. Everest region on the backs of Nepalese porters, so we had 600 men who carried loads for 17 days, across the country into our climbing region. Altogether, I suppose you could say that almost 700 men were involved in one way or the other. It is a team expedition, and it’s very much in the form of a pyramid effort. The two men who reach the summit are completely dependent on the combined effort of all those involved lower down.”

Each of us has a role to play in this movement. Each of us belongs here, to be fed, to find comfort, and to be equipped for the journey ahead. It is in the Christian community that we can flourish and be fulfilled. It is in this community that we can find strength and courage to challenge the status quote. It is in our community that we can encounter God with us in every part of our journey.

For the past few weeks, I have been reading through the book of Acts, trying to understand how this ancient story has relevance in an institution that is now 2500 years old. How can this rag-tag bunch of converts from the first century, offer us a window into the future of the Church?

What I am realizing is that there are two major themes in Acts. The first one is that the leaders of the early church are not in control. God is in control. This not their church, or your church, or my church, but we are God’s church. We have

been entrusted with the care and responsibility of this community of faith to promote resiliency, flourishing, and fulfillment of Life. God, not us is in control of this community. Now if you have control issues as I do, that might be a terrible idea to swallow, but each of us has the responsibility to promote the values of this institution. We each must see that a healthy and vibrant community continues into the future not just for the next person, but for the person we don't even know exists. As we see throughout Acts this is an inspirational idea, far too often we see Church as a human project, and human projects always fall short. But Church is something bigger than each one of us. It is God's project, and that cannot be contained in the walls of anyone building but gives birth to creativity and innovation that spreads like wildflowers.

The second theme in Acts is that everyone within this community is equipped to share the Gospel. And in Acts, it is often the most unlikely people who are called into leadership. Everyone, whether you have been a lifelong member, passing through as a student, a recent arrival or this is your first time here this community needs you. Everyone here can lead, and there are no requirements other than a willingness to answer God's call and say "Here I am." "I want to be part of this movement!"

This morning we are welcoming new members into our community, but we are also celebrating those who in the next few weeks will be leaving our community as they graduate and go out into the world. During our joys and concerns, our graduates will be presented with a rose, with the thorns still on. This is to remind them that in the beauty of God's there may be painful moments that we still must navigate and deal with. We need people who are embedded in the life of this community, and we need people who will go out into the world and share the message of God's unwavering love. Everyone belongs here.

Amen