

All Together ~ May 15, 2011

Acts 2:42-47; I Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10; Psalm 23

Huddled together like a flock of sheep, those early followers of Christ watched and waited and prayed for the return of their Master. They grieved, as those who lose loved ones still grieve, they visited the temple and they vowed to stay together, even to the point of sharing all they had. If one was in need they met that need. The early church survived through communal living, in the spirit of “one for all and all for one.”

Oh, they had Peter and they had one another but they wanted their Good Shepherd to appear to lead them from where they were to where they could be. Few wandered off. Their devotion, to the new way of life he had shown them, remained strong. This doesn't mean they didn't waver and have their disagreements, they did, but the core hung on with firm resolve. They had all been called together by the shepherd, whose voice they knew and they were not about to be taken away by those they did not know.

They were committed to living, and spreading, the good news of Christ. And so, they waited and they grew in number.

They hoped that their wait would be very brief, but that was not to be. The scriptures for this morning were composed long after the death of Jesus. The Book of Acts, a companion piece to the Gospel of Luke was written in 80-90 C.E. or A.D. This is about 50-60 years following the crucifixion. The gospel of John was written at about the same time, and the First Letter of Peter was composed between 70-90 C.E. The earliest followers were dying off and a record of just what had happened, in the eyes of the beholders, was needed to help continue and promote this new way of doing religion. The time of waiting for the return of Christ had lengthened.

Right now, there are those who believe we do not have much longer to wait for this event. May 21, 2011 is the day of reckoning—the time of judgment.

On that day, all the very best people in God's creation will be raptured up to be with their Maker while the rest of us will stay behind to await the end of the world which will take place on October 21 of this year. People who have made these predictions in the past have, obviously, been in error. They seem to have forgotten that Jesus said, “Only the Father knows the hour and the day when these things will occur.”

Our world is in a sorry state. But, those of our faith who would like to see it survive need to focus on what it is that unites us rather than on those things that tend to divide us. This is what has allowed us to survive to this day through earthquake, wind, fire and persecution.

There is a thin strand of commonality that continues to bind us together. That strand is composed of the teachings we have from Jesus that remind us that we need to get back to the basics and do away with all human constructs that attempt to close and secure the gateway of our faith. We need to turn away from seeking litmus tests that determine who is the most Christian and who falls short.

Jesus was inclusive in his teachings. At first he might have seen his mission as only to the Jews, but he discovered that the need around him was not restricted to one nationality or faith. The gate was open to Jews and Greeks, males and females, slave and freemen alike. The way to

a fresh new view of an old faith system was revealed to those who had eyes and could see and those who had ears and could hear. They didn't always understand what it was he was trying to tell them. Much to their credit, they stayed with him and struggled to discover the path he set before them.

They knew they were like sheep and that they needed someone to lead them forward and to keep them safe. The little First Letter of Peter offered them consolation during the times they suffered. The author urged them to remain faithful and to put their lives in the hands of God when they suffered for doing good. He told them not to return evil for evil but to rise above it and continue on in their faith.

How do these scriptures for this morning speak to us? Do they remind us that if we support one another in doing good, we will be following the pathway set before us? Do they tell us that even if we fail and wander away from time to time, the gate is always open for us to return home and to refocus ourselves on a better way of living? Do they tell us that there may be times when we will suffer to uphold and live our faith, but that we are never alone in this struggle? Do we understand what it means to move forward in the spirit of "one for all and all for one?"

The followers of old managed to see through all the problems their world faced. They tried to make things better. We know we can do the same with a God who loves and upholds us through all we might endure.

Amen