

## Pentecost 4 / Proper 8 (A)

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### Community, Communication and Communion

- In my life as an adult Christian, I've celebrated Palm Sunday under many different circumstances,
    - Including three PS services in the basement of the American Embassy in Riyadh in S.SA.
      - Out the window were the Religious Police
        - Patrolling outside, not so much a threat as an unwanted presence
      - Today we're meeting via Zoom, and we are taking many precautions to keep Zoom bombers outside.. those who would disrupt our service
        - Also not so much a threat, but an unwanted presence
  - In both these circumstances I reflected on : why we at Christ Church are here, gathered as we are, and why it is so important that we gather in this Zoom community
    - Look at communication, community, and communion
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### Communication & Community

- All around town, people are trying new ways of communication to keep a sense of community alive
    - Here at Christ Church, we're on Zoom meeting #4 for our services, more, if we include EP
    - Red Door volunteers communicating through a long email chain - Days of Our Lives
    - Men's Group are already in Month #2 of meeting by Zoom
    - The Kiwanis have had their 2nd Zoom meeting on Thursday
      - The Chamber of Commerce's Stephanie Hamilton (Rotary Prez): Rotary has been doing a newsletter, but it's good to see familiar faces. She plans to set up Zoom
  - Why do we have all these flurry of meetings?
    - Number1: In a time of social distancing, we look for other means of creating and sustaining community
    - Number 2: Our kids are worried about us old timers, and perhaps some think that the time when we may be seeing each other for the last time might be coming faster than we know...
  - However, when we meet on Zoom as members of Christ Episcopal Church, we have an added element that is not available to the members of the Kiwanis Club at their meetings:
    - We celebrate Holy Communion.
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### Communion Then & Now

- The Holy Communion that we celebrate today has many of the same elements that we share with the first Holy Communion service in the Upper Room
- The most significant connection we share with the service held in the Upper Room 2,000 years ago is that:

- Today, we face an almost existential threat to our survival in this time of Corona virus
  - And the Supper in the Upper Room, Jesus and his disciples faces a similar existential moment.
- Jesus and the disciples knew the temple authorities were closing in on him; he knew that his freedom and life were about to be taken away.
  - Yet, Jesus recognized that his disciples needed a way
    - to commemorate that time when all seemed lost,
    - and to hold onto that time when new possibilities were seemingly just within reach.
- Jesus recognized that this was the moment
  - To celebrate the time that was given to them
  - and to connect with each other, to connect with God, and for God to connect with them.
- Well, some of the disciples might have thought that now was the time to use their time more wisely,
  - and with the agents of Rome and of the Sanhedrin closing in, it might be a good time to scatter and head back to Galilee
  - Time was slipping away, with Jesus being on the verge of being arrested and scourged and tried and crucified....
- But instead of heading out of Jerusalem, Jesus took time to continue the meal, to pick up a loaf of bread, to pass the cup
  - and to establish the highly symbolic ritual which we still reenact today

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## Celebration

- The question that we all might ask today, in light of all the dangers that surrounded Jesus:
  - Why does the Prayer Book call this “The Celebration of The Holy Communion” (and we even have a celebrant to conduct the service)
    - What’s to celebrate?
- Even the Prayer Book begins our celebration of Holy Communion in a less than celebratory way:
  - Three of the four Eucharistic Prayers open by setting the scene in a time of danger and dread:
    - Eucharistic Prayer A: “On the night he was handed over to suffering and death...”
    - Prayer B: “On the night before he died for us...”
    - Prayer C: “On the night he was betrayed...”
- That is not celebration as we commonly think of it.

- Typically when we celebrate events, we consider them joyful, happy and festive: Christmas, Easter, Independence Day, Canada Day (for those who are so inclined)
  - However, there are also times in our lives that we celebrate,
    - Events that seemed like total disasters at the time,
    - but once having been gone through these events, we understand them as events that changed the course of our lives...and are worthy of celebration:
- Sometimes these are called Significant Emotional Events - those events by which we come to a turning point in our lives,
  - and after those events occur, our lives will be much different afterwards than they were before.
- These Significant Emotional Events include such things as:
  - The death of a spouse
  - Moving from one house to another
  - Divorce
  - Childbirth
  - even living in fear of a life-threatening disease
- How do we celebrate these events...these Significant Emotional Events?
  - For the high points in our lives (birthdays, anniversaries, weddings), we often celebrate these events as family and friends gather together...
  - But when we are living through a Significant Emotional Event, even if friends and family are there, we can feel very alone and isolated.
    - We can talk with friends... and family... or the clergy...
      - But...ultimately, it seems that in these moments, we stand alone
- And yet, praise God, Jesus gave us the Celebration of Holy Communion
  - To free us from fear and from standing alone,
    - to bring before God our deepest fears and worries....whatever they may be.
    - to connect us with each other
    - and to connect us with God
- We see a glimmer of this in our fourth Eucharistic Prayer, which opens with words that reflect that more positive insight:
  - Prayer D: "When the hour had come for him to be glorified by you..."
  - These words remind us that just when everything was about to turn into disaster,
    - Jesus was able to provide us with a positive assurance that everything was going to be all right...even when despair and fear seemed to be the only options.
- That's is the Celebration that Jesus gave us at the Last Supper:

- A ritual that will connect us with God,
  - when fear can threaten to take over our lives
  - When we're on the precipice, looking at something very, very frightening
- That's when we need a place to go, for support and love and strength.
  - Communion within a community is that place
  - and we thank God to have that in our lives.
- Holy Communion is a Celebration that breaks aware the barriers of isolation and fear.
  - Jesus offered communion to all the disciples, including Judas, who would betray him.
  - "This is my blood of the New Covenant," he said, "which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."
  - Jesus was offering, in Holy Communion, a real commitment of God
    - to be with us and love us and to bring us into new life,
      - no matter how unworthy we might feel,
      - no matter what it is in our lives that we're facing
  - Even at that moment in the Upper Room, with his liberty about to be taken away and his life clearly threatened, Jesus paused to tell us "This is my body; this is my blood"
- He's here...alive and with us in every situation,
  - And no matter whether that situation is one of joy, or a significant emotional event, or an existential threat,
  - Jesus will still be with us
    - To comfort us, to support us, and to give us hope.