

The Second Sunday of Easter - Year C  
April 11, 2010  
The Reverend Robert P. Travis

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## *Koinonia*

Acts 5:27-32, Psalm 150, Revelation 1:4-8, John 20:19-31

It is still Easter here at Church of the Ascension, in fact, all over the Christian world it is still Easter. We celebrate Easter for 50 days following Easter Sunday, a time which has come to be called, the great fifty days. So while the commercial world has moved on, into summer time the seasonal shelves are cleared of all the bunnies and pastel candies, replaced by plastic party ware, and beach gear. We are still on that first Easter Sunday.

Our reading today, is only hours later, than our reading last Sunday. It begins, “when it was evening on that day,” and we see the rest of the disciples' first encounter with the risen Christ. As you may remember, it was Mary Magdalene, who was the first to encounter the risen Lord, and therefore was the first Apostle. In any case, we are still on Easter Sunday, because the significance of it for our lives, is great enough, to take a while to discuss. And really, the hope of us all, is that we can live in Easter for the rest of our lives here and into eternity.

But how can we do that? How can we continue to live in Easter? Easter is all about new life, and as the last verse of the gospel said, the whole point of the gospel being written, is so we may believe, and through believing we may have life in Jesus' name.

Well, I think it comes down to one of our baptismal vows. The model for life in His name was set out for us with the apostles, and it's pretty simple. It's present in our Gospel reading today.

You may remember that whenever we renew our vows, we are asked “will you continue in the apostles' teaching, and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

What that is, in the New Testament, is summed up by the Greek word *Koinonia*. That is what the disciples were doing from the very beginning from that first Easter Day, they were gathered together, for fellowship, for prayer, to eat together. They shared their lives together, and they shared experiences with one another. In that first experience they had the doors locked, out of fear. They were afraid that those who killed Jesus, would come

after them. They shared the experience of Fear, and Jesus came among them, and gave them peace.

When they realized it was Jesus, after he showed them his hands and his side. They shared the experience of rejoicing. Jesus was with them, and again gave them peace. Then He said He was sending them out as the Father had sent Him. So they shared a common mission.

That is the continuing in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers, that we are called to. That is Koinonia.

We are supposed to have a group of people we learn with, share our lives with, share our deepest experiences with, a small group of people with whom we experience the presence of the risen Christ. And with whom we seek His will for our lives.

But Thomas who was one of their group, was not with them when they shared that experience. And he missed out. They tried to convey to him what they had experienced together, but were unable to do it. Have you ever had the experience of trying to explain to someone about some awesome experience you have had with a group?

We try and try, and often we get frustrated and say, "I guess you just had to be there." It is essential, in being a part of such a group, that we be there consistently, because the shared experience of the group, cannot be adequately experienced by those who are not there, no matter how hard we try to tell them.

But of course our excitement about those experiences can lead others to want to take part, and can help the group grow, and divide into other groups. That's the kind of natural growth that the disciples experienced as well. And the early church grew, through the sharing of Koinonia.

But that first time, Thomas missed out. In spite of their efforts to convince him of their experience. He couldn't believe until he had experienced the risen Lord for himself. And Jesus had compassion on Thomas in his situation.

The disciples gathered again. The gospel says a week later they were meeting again, in the house, and this time Thomas was with them. Again, the risen Jesus came among them, and again, he gave them his peace.

Thomas was given the opportunity to experience, much of what the group had already experienced, in part, because the group continued to meet as they had before. And Jesus

honored their continuing by being with them again.

As a result of being with the group, when Jesus came among them, Thomas came to believe that his Savior had risen, and his faith was deepened to the point, that he recognized not only Jesus his master, but Jesus his God.

We are about to embark on an effort here at church of the Ascension, to give every member of the church, the experience of continuing in the Apostles' Teaching, and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers.

As I mentioned before, the Greek word Koinonia distinctively describes all of those things. So that we don't confuse this with just another social group. We will call this ministry Koinonia groups. If you were in an Acts 2:42 group before, this will be similar to that, because that verse itself is where the Koinonia idea is most clearly described.

My hope is to give everyone in this church the chance to participate in a small group, like that of the early disciples, to give everyone the opportunity to experience the Risen Lord Jesus, In the meeting of his followers. In a church like this it is wonderful to get to worship with hundreds of other Christians and to be a part of a community where because of the large number of active people we can do so much together. But we need experiences of greater intimacy. It takes a smaller group that meets consistently to experience that closeness to Christ that comes from being close to one another.

Those who experienced the Alpha Course, that we completed before Holy Week, all seemed to respond. That the experience of the small groups was the best part of that Course and so many people reported that their faith was deepened because of what they shared with one another in those small groups.

Some of our first Koinonia groups are going to be continuations of those Alpha groups. And some are going to start from other ways of organizing ourselves. Look for opportunities to participate in these Koinonia groups in the next few months. That way, you can continue the experience of Easter, the new life of our Risen Lord, as you share your life and His with others from this same community of faith. Blessed are those who have not seen and have come to believe.